The Taming of Will Graham

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The Taming of Will Graham

by youoctopimymind

Summary

Will Graham has hidden his omega status using heat suppressants, and it's worked out well for him so far. He's managed to secure a job teaching at the FBI academy, after his time working as a homicide detective. Though the alphas he works with find him find him kind of small and jumpy, the nature of his job keeps anyone from guessing his status as an omega-

Until he goes into heat at a crime scene, minutes after fatally shooting Garret Jacob Hobbs.

In this world, omegas must be kept by an alpha or blood-related beta guardian. When Will wakes up in a hospital bed, his secret exposed, he desperately needs someone to take him in to avoid being sold at auction. Luckily, Dr. Lecter generously steps up and agrees to fulfill the role of Will's alpha. But, the life of a high-status alpha's mate is going to be difficult for Will to adjust to. Hannibal is more than happy to show him the ropes, though, even if he has to drag him kicking and screaming.

Notes

This first chapter is mostly a recap of episode one, with some changes to make to fit it into the A/B/O universe. Feel free to skim! Chapter 2 is already written and will be posted a few minutes after chapter 1.

Chapter 1

Will Graham is a beta, as far as anybody knows.

After all, an omega could never hope for a life like his, a former homicide detective, now a full time professor at the FBI academy. Such dreams were lofty even for most betas, most officers being rugged, hormonal alphas. So, most accepted without much question that Will was a beta, if a small, somewhat pretty beta. And that was how Will wanted it.

As his students file out of his classroom, Will gets the unmistakable scent of alpha approaching. He looks up and sees Jack Crawford, an alpha he has worked with before. He quickly unfolds his glasses and places them on his face, hoping to avoid eye contact with the man.

“Mr. Graham.” Crawford says, approaching the professor.

Will is easily dwarfed by his size, and his scent is powerful, indicating his status as a virile alpha. He takes an involuntary step backwards.

“I’m special agent Jack Crawford.” The alpha says, not seeming to notice Will’s hesitancy. “I lead the Behavioral Science Unit.”

“We’ve met.” Will responds curtly.

Jack’s lips quirk at this. Alphas are always caught off guard by Will’s directness, but Will is relieved that he doesn’t seem offended by it.

“Yes. We had a disagreement about the museum when we opened it.”

“I disagreed with what you named it.”

“The Evil Minds Museum?”

“It’s a little hammy, Jack.” Will smirks.

Jack smirks back. “So, you’ve hitched your horse to a teaching post, now? I understand you found field work grating, you find it difficult to be sociable.”

“I find teaching easier.” Will admits. “I just talk at them, I don’t have to listen. There’s nothing social about it. And it’s less competitive with students, rather than agents.”

“Yes.” Jack agrees. “I recall you got quite tired of competing with the alphas.”

“Forgive me for thinking a crime scene isn't an appropriate place for a pissing contest.” Will deadpans.

“If I recall, you were the winner of a few of those contests, Mr. Graham.” Jack says dryly, and moves closer to Will. He pushes the rim of Will’s glasses up, so that Will has to make eye

contact with him.

“Where do you fall on the spectrum, Will?”

Will ducks his head, a spark of anxiety shooting through him as he meets the alpha’s gaze.

“I’m closer to asperger’s and autistics than narcissists and sociopaths. And probably closer to an omega than any alpha.”

“But you can empathize with them?” Jack asks. “Narcissists and sociopaths?”

“And Alphas.” Will snarks. “But I can empathize with anybody. It’s got less to do with personality disorders and more to do with an overactive imagination.”

Jack smiles at this, leaning close to the smaller man. “I’d like to borrow your imagination.”

*

Now, Jack is leading Will through the FBI Academy training grounds, briefing him on the case.

“Eight omegas, all female, abducted from eight different Minnesota campuses in the last eight months.” Jack is saying.

“I thought there were seven.” Will points out as he follows behind.

“There were.”

“When did you tag the eighth?”

“About three minutes before I walked into your lecture hall.” Jack says curtly.

“Abductions?” Will asks. “So there’s no bodies?”

“There’s *nothing* .” Jack responds. “No bodies, no parts of bodies, nothing that comes *out* of a body. We’ve got lonely swabs and evidence kits.”

“Then those omegas weren’t taken from where you think they were taken.” Will says simply.

“Then where were they taken from?”

“I don’t know.” Will responds with a shrug. “Someplace else.”

The pair reach Jack’s office, where a map of Minnesota is pinned to the wall, dotted with specks of blue marking the disappearance of each girl. Surrounding this are pictures of the eight victims, all dark haired, dark eyed omegas.

“All abducted on Friday, so it’s not reported until Monday.” Jack says as the pair enter. “However he’s covering his tracks, he needs the weekend to do it.”

“Number Eight?”

“Elise Nichols.” Jack replies. “St. Cloud State on the Mississippi. Disappeared on Friday. Was supposed to house sit for her parents over the weekend, feed the cat. She never made it home.”

“Yeah, one through seven are dead, don’t you think?” Will says, studying the display on the wall “He’s not keeping them around. He got himself a new one.”

“So we focus on Elise Nichols.”

Will nods.

“They’re all very Mall of America.” Will says, examining the photos. “That’s a lot of wind-chafed skin.”

“Same hair color, same eye color.” Jack agrees. “Roughly the same age. Same height, same weight. So what is it about all of these girls?”

“It’s not about all of these girls. It’s just about one of them.” Will states. “He’s like Willy Wonka. Every girl he takes is a candy bar, and hidden in amongst all of those candy bars is the one true intended victim, which, if we follow through on our metaphor, is your golden ticket.”

“So, is he warming up for his golden ticket, or just reliving whatever it is he did to her?”

“The golden ticket wouldn’t be the first taken, and she wouldn’t be the last.” Will says. His eyes follow the red string linking the blue dots on the map. “He would, um, hide how special she was. I mean, I would. Wouldn’t you?”

Jack is quiet for a moment. Then,

“I want you to get closer to this.”

“No.” Will says at once. “You have Heimlich at Harvard and Bloom at Georgetown. They do the same thing I do.”

“That’s not exactly true, is it?” Jack points out. “You have a very specific way of thinking about things.

Will blinks. “Has there been a lot of discussion about the, uh, specific way I think?”

“You make jumps you can’t explain, Will.”

“No, no.” Will corrects. “The evidence explains.”

“Then help me find some evidence”

Will swallows. “That may require me to be sociable.”

*

And just like that, Will finds himself in Elise Nichols home that night. Her parents sit at the kitchen table, fretting.

“I knew we shouldn’t have let her go.” Her father is saying. “In my day, it simply wasn’t done. Omegas stayed in the home. You can’t trust them out on their own. Even if she wasn’t taken by this psychopath, she could be anywhere! She could’ve gotten on a train and-”

“She looks like the other girls.” Mrs. Nichols pipes up, her eyes cast down.

She’s a mousy omega, brown hair falling into her eyes as she tries to make herself smaller, clearly feeling the anger of her alpha husband.

“She fits the profile, yes.” Jack says. He keeps his voice soft and even, the way officers are trained to speak to omegas. Will notes how different it is from his usual voice, gruff and hard, or his alpha voice which can shake even other alphas. For some reason, it makes Will’s skin crawl to hear him speak so gently.

“Could she still be alive?” Mrs. Nichols asks, still looking down. Will can hear the tears in her voice.

“We simply have no way of knowing.” Jack answers in the same, gentle tone.

“How’s the cat?” Will asks, and the omega woman starts.

“What?” She asks, looking up at him through her lashes.

“Your cat?” Will says again. “Elise was supposed to feed it. Was the cat weird when you came home? It must’ve been hungry. It didn’t eat all weekend.”

Mrs. Nichols shrinks in her seat. Mr. Nichols answers for her.

“I didn’t notice.”

“Could you give us a moment, please?” Jack says, his voice returning to its usual gruffness. He pulls Will aside.

“He took her from here.” Will says simply. “She got on a train, she came home, she fed the cat. He took her.”

Jack makes a noise in his throat, then pulls out his radio

“The Nichols’ house is a crime scene.” he barks into it. “I need ERT immediately. I want Zeller, Katz, and Jimmy Price. Yes, and a photographer.”

Mr Nichols rises from his seat, and Will can smell the alpha hormones coming off of him.

“Why is it a crime scene now?” He demands. Will ignores him.

“Can I see your daughter’s room?”

Mt. Nichols turns to him. “Police were there this morning. What’s going on?”

Without a word, Will rushes up the stairs to Elise’s bedroom. Mr. Nichols trails behind him.

“No– don’t touch that!” Will says as Mr. Nichols reaches for the doorknob. “Mr. Nichols, please put your hands in your pockets and avoid touching anything.”

“We’ve been in and out of here all day!” Mr. Nichols argues. “You’re not going to tell me what to do in my own house!”

“Mr. Nichols, please-” Will says but as he opens the door both fall silent.

There, tucked into her bed, is the dead body of Elise Nichols. Mr. Nichols makes a choked noise in his throat.

“Elise-”

“Mr. Nichols, I need you to leave the room.” Will says, trying to usher the alpha backward.

Mr. Nichols growls, sending a chill down Will’s spine. “No, get out of my house! That’s my daughter!”

The alpha is pushing past him, and Will is fighting the urge to cower with everything in him.

“Mr. Nichols, please.”

“Back up!” Jack shouts from behind him, using his alpha voice. Both Mr. Nichols and Will flinch.

Mr. Nichols quickly gets over the fear, spinning to challenge Jack. “Fuck you, buddy! No one is going to keep me away from her! That’s my daughter!”

“And if you want justice for your daughter, you’ll let the professionals handle this!” Jack shouts back. “Go downstairs and comfort your wife! You’re only making things worse for everyone involved.”

Mr. Nichols looks from Jack to the body of his daughter. Finally, he slinks past Jack, down the stairs.

Jack approaches Will, speaking to him the same way he spoke to Mrs. Nichols

“When you’re ready to talk, you talk. If you don’t feel like it, you don’t talk. We’ll be downstairs. You let me know when you’re ready for us to come in.”

Will nods, and Jack follows Mr. Nichols down the stairs. Will approaches Elise's body.

He can smell the alpha on her, all over her, but there's no scent of semen.

Of course not . Will thinks.

Her face looks peaceful. He imagines the alpha over her, gentle with her, caressing her, his hands sliding around her throat. And then he imagines him choking her, using every inch of his superior alpha strength.

He wonders if she fought. A number of omega victims don't. It's nicknamed "the lamb response." The omega, terrified, is subdued by such a rush of hormones from their own body that they can't move. They literally lay down and bare their necks to their aggressors. Will feels bile rise in his throat.

How lucky am I to escape such a fate . He thinks.

"You're Will Graham!" Comes a voice from behind him.

It's a young woman, dressed in the usual FBI garb. She's an alpha, several inches taller than Will, and she's grinning. Will frowns, he always detested the thrill alpha investigators got from these sort of things.

"You're not supposed to be in here." He tells her.

"You wrote the standard monograph on time of death by insect activity." She says. Then she holds up her tweezers, showing Will what's between them. "I found antler velvet in two of the wounds. You, uh, not real FBI?"

"I'm a special investigator."

"Never been an FBI agent?"

"Um. Strict screening procedures." Will explains.

"Detects instability." The woman grins. "You unstable?"

Will falters. The FBI would do a full chromosomal screening and find his secondary status, and there would go his entire life, not just his career. But, of course, she didn't need to know that.

"Now, you know you're not supposed to be in here." Jack says to the woman, pushing through the door.

"I found antler velvet in two of the wounds," The woman says, ignoring the chastising. "Like she was gored. I was looking for velvet in the other wounds – but I was interrupted."

A man Will didn't notice speaks up from beside him. Will jumps.

“Hold on, excuse me.” He says. “Look, deer and elk pin their prey, okay? They put all their weight into their antlers, try and suffocate a victim. That’s how they would kill, like, a fox or a coyote.”

Will sighs and takes a step away. The conversation continues.

“All right,” Jack says. “Elise Nichols was strangled, suffocated, her ribs are broken.”

No, Will thinks. *That’s wrong.*

“Antler velvet is rich in nutrients.” He says. “It actually promotes healing. He may have put it in there on purpose.”

“You think he was trying to heal her?” Jack asks.

“He wanted to undo as much as he could,” Will says. “Given that he’d already killed her.”

“He put her back where he found her,”Jack says.

“Whatever he did to the others, he couldn’t do it to her.”

“Then, is this his golden ticket?” Jack asks

“No.” Will says flatly. “This is an apology.”

*

It’s monday, and Will has his face submerged in the sink of the FBI academy’s men’s room. He hasn’t slept well since finding Elise’s corpse. He’s lost his train of thought in every class he’s taught today, his mind conjuring the image of the girl hung on a row of antlers, her head lolled to one side, baring her neck to her killer.

He’d canceled his last two classes, hoping the break would clear his mind, but then he’d found himself unable to go home. He wandered the FBI academy’s campus in almost a stupor, finding his way into the men’s room, where he hoped some cold water could calm his nerves.

He pulls his face from the sink and gasps for breath as he hears the familiar click of shoes, and smells the unmistakable alpha scent.

“What are you doing in here?” Jack asks as he walks into the men’s room

“I enjoy the smell of urinal cake.” Will deadpans.

“Me too.” Jack snarks back. “We need to talk.”

A young alpha walks through the entrance and Jack spins on his heels, addressing the student in his alpha voice.

"USE THE LADIES' ROOM!" He cries, and the alpha turns on his heels and leaves. Jack smiles. He turns to see Will looking down at the floor his body pointed away from the alpha.

"Relax, beta." Jack laughs. "Just requesting a little privacy. You respect my judgment, don't you?"

"Yes." Will responds, still looking down.

"Good, because we will stand a better chance of catching this guy with you in the saddle."

"Yeah, I'm in the saddle." Will responds "I'm just a little confused which direction I'm pointing. This isn't a psychopath, Jack. At least, not one I've ever read about. And it isn't alpha penetrative aggression, either. He's sensitive, he's protective. He doesn't touch these girls in any way that would be considered sexual. He feels so deeply for them. I don't understand any of it."

"You understand something," Jack argues. "Otherwise, you wouldn't have said, 'This is an apology.' What is he apologizing for?"

"He couldn't honor her." Will explains. "He feels bad."

"I thought psychopaths didn't feel bad!"

"They don't!"

"Then what kind of crazy is he?!" Jack shouts. He's using his alpha voice again. Will shrinks away.

"He couldn't show her he loved her, so he put her corpse back where he killed it." Will says after a moment. "Whatever crazy that is."

Jack takes a moment before responding.

"You think he loves these girls?"

"He loves one of them." Will answers. "A-And, yes, he loves the others, or at least something like it. He wants to protect them, take care of them. It's all very…"

Will looks Jack up and down before finishing.

"It's all very alpha."

" There was no semen," Jack says "There was no saliva. Elise Nichols died a virgin. She *stayed* a virgin."

"It's not that kind of love!" Will responds. "He wouldn't disrespect them that way! It's not like an alpha with a mate, it's like an alpha with a pup. He doesn't want these girls to suffer.

He kills them quickly and, to his thinking, with mercy. He's protecting them."

"Protecting them from what?"

Will swallows.

"All of the victims were freshmen in college." He says. "The killer is older, in his forties or fifties. It's only in the last decade and a half that American colleges are going co-ed. These girls are afforded a freedom he feels is wrong- is unsafe for them. He's trying to protect them from everything. He's trying to protect them from themselves."

Jack eyes Will warily. "You know a lot about alphas and omegas for a beta"

Will shrugs.

"It's hard not to pick some things up in this line of work." He responds. "90% of murderers are alphas, 75% of victims are omegas. At some point you learn the dynamic. All I know, though, is he has to take the next girl soon 'cause he knows he's gonna get caught. One way or another."

*

[One Week Later]

Will is waiting for Jack in his office, a thick folder full of notes in his lap. They had arranged to meet to talk about the case in Will's break between classes- a time he usually spent grading. It annoys Will, then, for Jack to show up late this way, but finally he hears the door swing open, and rises from his seat.

"Will, hello." Jack says, but Will is focused on the figure behind him, a tall, slender Alpha, maybe ten years his senior.

"This is Dr. Hannibal Lecter," Jack says. "He's going to be assisting us on this case."

Will swallows, the alpha's scent is overpowering, stronger than any alpha he's smelled before. The alpha locks eyes with him, and Will finds it difficult to look away, his breathing picks up slightly. The alpha seems to notice, a slight smile tugging at his lips. Will panics, finally pulling his eyes away from the alpha's.

He pulls out a suppressant, kept loose in his pocket, and swallows it dry.

"Sorry." He says quickly. "An aspirin. I tend to get migraines. It's nice to meet you, Dr. Lecter."

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Dr. Lecter says. He speaks in an accent Will has never heard before. “You are not fond of eye contact, are you, Will Graham?”

“Eyes are distracting.” Will responds. “You see too much, you don’t see enough. Every other alpha takes it as a challenge, omegas are trained to avoid it for fear of punishment. It’s easier to avoid it all together.”

“It’s not supposed to be so difficult for betas.” Dr. Lecter notes, and takes a step closer to Will.

Will takes a step backward.

“You’d be impressed with the things I can make difficult for myself.” He snarks.

“I think I’d be saddened, more than anything.” Dr. Lecter says. He takes another step forward. “Your thoughts are difficult? Your dreams?”

“I compartmentalize.” Will says, taking another step back. “I build forts.”

“But associations come easy.” Says Dr. Lecter.

“So do forts.”

The alpha looks him up and down, smiling softly, pityingly.

“I don’t think that’s true at all.” Dr. Lecter says, taking another step towards Will. “I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.”

Will takes several steps back in quick succession, stopping only when his back hits Jack's desk with a loud clatter. He swallows.

“Who- Whose profile are you working on?” He asks, eyes wide. He turns to Jack. “Whose profile is he working on?”

“Will-” Jack begins.

“Please don’t psychoanalyze me, Doctor.” Will says “You won’t like what you find.”

“I’m sorry, Will.” Hannibal says. He seems bemused, which throws Will off even further. “Observing is what we do. I can’t shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off.”

“I have to go.” Will says all at once. “I have a class to teach.”

“Will-” Jack says, but the smaller man pushes past the pair, and walks into the hallway.

“Maybe we shouldn’t poke him like that” Will hears Jack say to the doctor, his voice hushed. “Perhaps a less direct approach.”

The doctor ignores the remark, speaking loudly, almost like he wants Will to hear.

“He is unusual for a beta” The doctor says and Will stills in the hallway, listening.

“What he has is pure empathy,” Dr. Lecter continues.”It overwhelms him. He can assume any point of view, and feel the emotions of the other so strongly that it scares him. It’s an uncomfortable gift. I’ve never had a patient with it who wasn’t an omega.”

“But it’s omegas you work with.” Jack points out.

“Typically.” He says. “Though Will is far from my first beta patient.”

“He’s told me himself he’s closer to an omega than an alpha.”

“That’s clear.” Dr. Lecter says with a laugh. “But that gift of his- perception is a tool that can be pointed at both ends. I believe I can help our good Will realize more than a few things about this case.”

*

The crows are cawing in the Minnesota field, and an omega woman’s body is impaled on the antlers of a buck’s head. The crows perch on the antlers, eating at their makeshift dinner table, and an agent does his best to wave them away- to preserve as much of the body as possible. Will can’t look away.

“I feel like I’m dreaming.” Will says quietly, and he does. Everything feels floaty, and far away.

“Stag head was reported stolen last night,” Jack says, approaching from behind. “About a mile from here.”

“Just the head?” Will asks.

“Minneapolis Homicide’s already made a statement.” Jack continues, ignoring Will’s question. “They’re calling him the Minnesota Shrike.”’

“Like the bird?” Will asks

“Shrike’s a perching bird.” An agent interjects. The same agent who tried to to wave the birds away. “Impales mice and lizards on thorny branches and barbed wire. Rips their organs right out of their bodies, puts them in a little birdie pantry, and eats them later.”

“I can’t tell whether it’s sloppy or shrewd.” Jack says, the disgust clear in his voice.

“He wanted her found this way.” Will says. “It’s a punishment. He’s mocking her- he wants to humiliate her. Or us.”

“What happened to the love?” Jack asks. “Did the pup misbehave?”

Will almost gags at the thought.

“It’s not the same killer.” He says. “This isn’t the person who tucked Elise Nichols into bed. This isn’t alpha with his pup. This isn’t even an alpha with his mate.”

“He took her lungs.” Says another detective. “I’m pretty sure she was alive when he cut ’em out.”

“Our cannibal loves omegas.” Will says with a shake of his head. “He wants to protect them- to take care of them! He consumes them to keep some part of them with him. This girl’s killer didn’t love her at all. He didn’t care for her like a pup, he didn’t love her like a mate. He thought of her as a common whore- as no better than a pig.”

“So you think this was a copycat?”

“We never found any of the other girls out in a field like this.” Will says by way of an answer. “He has a house, maybe two, or a cabin. Something with an antler room. He has a daughter. An omega, the same age as the other girls. Same hair color, same eye color, same height, same weight. She’s an only child. She’s leaving home. He can’t stand the thought of losing her. She’s his golden ticket.”

“ And what about the copycat?” Jack asks.

Will waves his hand. “They’ll be nearly impossible to catch. They’re intelligent, a psychopath, definitely a sadist. Probably an alpha, but that’s only based on statistics. There’s no traceable motive, there’ll be no patterns. They may never kill this way again.”

“So how do you suggest we proceed?”

“Have Dr. Lecter draw up a psychological profile.” Will says bitterly. “You seemed very impressed with his opinion.”

“Dr. Lecter is a very well respected psychiatrist.” Jack replies, squaring his shoulders to challenge the smaller man. “Perhaps you should be impressed with his opinion, too.”

“I don’t like him.”

“He seemed very fond of you.” Jack replies. “You impressed him quite a bit. He said you were a very unusual beta.”

“I think I’m just unusual in general.” Will responds flatly. “I don’t think I can work with someone like him, someone so…”

“Alpha?” Jack asks. Will swallows.

“You know what I mean.” Will said. “I didn’t like the way he spoke to me.”

“He’s used to working with omegas.” Jack informs. “He works with victims of terrible crimes, draws up profiles for their aggressors. The omegas probably find it comforting- the ‘alpha’ of it all.”

“Well, I’m not an omega.” Will lies, though to him it isn’t really a lie.

He is nothing like a typical omega. Comparing the life he’s lived to the housewives of alphas was impossible. He’d never known a gentle hand, he’d fought tooth and nail for everything he’d been afforded in life. Even if he wasn’t really a beta, as far as he was concerned he may as well be.

“You said yourself you’re closer to an omega than any alpha.” Jack reminds him.

Will snorted. “Just because I’m not some meat head tripping over himself to enter a dick–measuring contest doesn’t mean I’m some helpless waif, either.”

“You don’t like omegas?” Jack asks.

“They make me nervous.” Will responds, ducking his head.

“Alphas make you nervous, too.” Jack notes.

Will grunts in response.

“You should reconsider your position on Dr. Lecter.” Jack conceded. “He’s not what you think he is.”

*

The next morning, Will is awoken by a knock at his door. He slides a robe over his pajamas (a t-shirt and boxers), and ties it. His dogs follow as he stumbles blearily to the door.

When he opens the door, he nearly shuts it again in shock. Dr. Lecter is standing there, a thermos, two cups, and a small bag of food in his hands. Will’s heart picks up, he takes a step back.

“Good morning Will.” The doctor smiles. “May I come in?”

“Where’s Crawford?” Will asks, panicked. He hasn’t taken his suppressant for the day, yet.

“Agent Crawford is deposed in court, I’m afraid.” The Doctor says. “The adventure will be yours and mine today. May I come in?”

“I- yes. Of course.” Will says, shuffling backward.

As Dr. Lecter enters, Will makes a B-line for his kitchen drawer, pulling his bottle of suppressants out. He flips the lid of and shakes it over his hand, only to find it empty. He swears under his breath.

“Is something wrong?” Dr. Lecter asks from the kitchen table.

“No.” Will lies, flinging his medicine cabinet open. Surely he had to have another bottle.

“Are you looking for something?”

“Just aspirin.” Will responds too quickly. He can’t seem to find his suppressants anywhere. “I feel a migraine coming on.”

“Ah, I brought some with me.” The Doctor replies cheerfully. “Come to the table, I’ll give it to you.”

Will could scream. His heart is pounding in his ears.

“Oh, I wouldn’t want to trouble you.” He says, doing his best not to sound panicked.

“It’s no trouble at all.” Dr. Lecter replies, and Will can hear the smile in his voice.

“Really, Doctor, I-”

“Will.” Dr. Lecter says in a tone that makes Will freeze. “Come. Sit. *Now* .”

Will shuts the cabinets, defeated, and makes his way to the table. The doctor smiles as he sits.

The doctor is speaking, divvying portions for himself and Will, but Will isn’t listening, his head swimming in panic.

The pills are supposed to build up . He tells himself. *It’s supposed to be okay to miss a dose or two. This is the first time I’m missed a dose in years, so I should be okay. I can stop by the pharmacy after work and pick up some more, if I can find my prescription. It should be fine.*

“Will.” Dr. Lecter says, pulling him from his thoughts.

Will jumps.

“Sorry, Dr. Lecter.” he says, and takes a bite of his food, an egg scramble with sausage.

“Mm.” He starts, the taste of the food startling him. “It’s delicious, thank you.”

“My pleasure.” Dr. Lecter smiles. He takes a breath.

“I would apologize for my analytical ambush the other day,” He says. “But I know I will soon be apologizing again, and you’ll tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies sparingly.”

“Let’s just keep it professional.” Will says shortly, his eyes cast down to his plate.

“Or we could socialize, like adults.” Dr. Lecter says, amusement coloring his voice. “God forbid we become friendly.”

“I don’t find you that interesting.” Will says flatly, looking up from his plate.

Dr. Lecter’s lip curls upward, revealing his canine tooth. Will shudders.

“You will.” Dr. Lecter responds, his voice not quite a growl, but intimidating nonetheless. He clears his throat.

“Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters.”

“I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field.” Will says flatly.

“And why is that?” Hannibal asks. “What didn’t your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?”

“Everything.” Will balks. “It was all wrong. It’s like he had to show me a negative so that I could see the positive. That crime scene was practically gift-wrapped.”

“The mathematics of human behavior,” Dr. Lecter responds coolly. “All those ugly variables. Some bad math with this Shrike fellow, huh? Are you reconstructing his fantasies?”

Will snorts.

“What kind of problems does our shrike have?” Hannibal asks.

“Uh, he has a few.” Will answers.

Dr. Lecter pauses, looking the smaller man up and down. “ Do you ever have any problems, Will?”

“No.” Will says shortly. The doctor laughs.

“Of course you don’t.” Dr. Lecter grins. “You and I are just alike: problem-free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.”

Will says nothing. It bothers him how the man seems to toy with him. He always feels a step behind the doctor.

“You know, Will?” The doctor says suddenly. “I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest China, used for only special guests.”

Will laughs outright at that. “And how do you see me?”

“You’re the hound I want guarding my house when the thief breaks in.” Dr. Lecter says, not disguising the fondness in his voice. “You’re a mutt from the streets, but you’re twice as clever as any well-bred dog.”

The doctor leans closer and Will feels himself start to freeze.

“You’ll be the finest dog around,” he whispers, his voice almost sultry. “Once you’re properly trained.”

Will swallows. He says nothing.

Dr. Lecter laughs. “Finish your breakfast.”

*

They pull into the parking lot of the construction site and Will throws the car into park. As he’s unbuckling he catches a glimpse of the doctor’s face. He’s smiling.

“What are you smiling at?” He asks.

“Peeking behind the curtain.” Dr. Lecter responds, still smiling. “I’m just curious how the FBI goes about its business, when it’s not kicking in doors.”

Will snorts.

“You’re lucky we’re not doing house-to-house interviews.” He snarks. Then, he explains. “We found a little piece of metal in Elise Nichols’ clothes- a shred from a pipe threader.”

“But there must be hundreds of construction sites all over Minnesota.”

“It’s a certain kind of metal, a certain kind of pipe, a certain kind of pipe coating.” Will explains. “We’re checking all the construction sites that use that kind of pipe.

“What are we looking for?” Dr. Lecter asks.

“At this stage, anything really.” Will admits. “But mostly, anything peculiar.”

With that, the pair crossed the gravel lot, heading into the office trailer. They’re greeted by a young woman wearing bright lipstick. Her name tag reads “Dixie.”

“How can I help you boys?” She asks, her accent morphing the word ‘help’ into ‘hep”.

Will flashes his badge “FBI. We need all the information you have on your pipe threaders.

The woman frowns. “Well, you're welcome to look through-”

And this is all the permission Will needs to come behind the desk. He begins opening the file cabinets, sifting through the papers. Dixie picks up the phone and quickly dials.

“Two fellas from the FBI.” She says when the other end picks up. “They’re goin’ through the drawers now. Mm-hmm. Puttin’ papers in file boxes. Yes, they are takin’ things. No. Well, they didn’t say– Yes, they can. What did you say your names were?”

Will ignores her.

“Garret Jacob Hobbs?” He asks, pulling a note out and holding it up to her

“He’s one of our pipe threaders.” she says. “Those are all the resignation letters. Plumbers’ Union requires ’em whenever members finish a job.

“I’ll call you back.” she whispers into the phone

“Does Mr. Hobbs have a daughter?” Will asks

“Might have.”

“Omega? ” Will asks “Eighteen or nineteen? Wind-chafed? Uh, plain but pretty? She’d have auburn hair, about this tall.”

“Maybe.” Dixie responds sharply. “I don’t know. I don’t keep company with these people.”

“What’s so peculiar about Garret Jacob Hobbs?” Dr. Lecter asks from behind Will

“He left a phone number.” Will responds. “No address.”

“And therefore he has something to hide?” Dr. Lecter asks

“The others all left addresses.” He responds, then turns to Dixie. “Do you have an address for Mr. Hobbs?”

*****

Will peels into the driveway of Garret Jacob Hobbs’ house, and nearly jumps out of the car. Dr. Lecter unbuckles slowly, following calmly behind.

Will is rushing towards the door, when it opens, and out stumbles a bleeding beta woman. Blood drenches her shirt, the ends of her blonde locks, pouring from a wound on her neck. Will rushes to her side.

She’s pale. Will imagines she was a pale woman any way, her blue eyes and white-blonde hair giving it away, but with the blood loss she’s downright ghostly. The crimson against her skin is a sharp contrast, making her look even paler.

She reaches for Will, who is pressing on her neck, trying to stop the bleeding. Her stiff, cold hands grab his wrists and she spasms. Then, she stills, and Will knows she is gone.

Will wrenches his wrists from her hands, focussing on getting in the door. He slams against it with every ounce of strength he has, and when he hears a crack he is unsure whether it’s from the door or his shoulder. He takes a step back and kicks, his foot hitting to the side of the lock. He kicks again, and again, until the door splinters apart, then pushes his way through.

“Garret Jacob Hobbs!” He calls. “FBI!”

Will freezes at the sight in front of him. Garret Jacob Hobbs holds his daughter, the golden ticket, and slashes at her throat with one deliberate strike. Will can hear her wild, animal-like gasps for air.

Will raises his pistol and aims for her father, fires three shots. Garret Hobbs takes each one to the chest, but he doesn't go down. Grinning wildly, he slashes again at his daughter's throat.

Will keeps shooting. Two more shots fired into the girl's father. With one last slash- a final hail Mary, Garret Jacob Hobbs falls to the ground.

"See?" Garret Hobbs asks as he lay dying on the floor. "See?"

Will's attention is brought to Abigail, who lies, wheezing, on the floor. He takes a step towards her, but collapses on the ground. A figure steps over him, and he is grateful to see Dr. Lecter addressing her wounds.

He watches her face, her glassy eyes, as the doctor works. Will breathes raggedly. He feels like his entire body is shutting down.

The paramedics rush in, taking little notice of Will as they usher the victim onto a gurney. Will can hear nothing but the ringing in his ears, but he sees Hannibal speaking to him. He gestures to Will on the ground and the paramedic nods as they wheel the victim out of the room.

Will is left alone, he doesn't know how long. His eyes search the room and fall on Garret Hobbs' body. His doing. He can feel himself sweating and shaking all at once.

Another paramedic comes in, Dr. Lecter following behind her. She's trying to speak to Will, but he can't make out most of what she says. She presses a hand to his cheek.

"Fever." Will hears her say to Dr. Lecter, but it sounds like he's hearing it through a fish bowl. Dr. Lecter nods. Will's vision is starting to tunnel. She presses something cold to his head, and Dr. Lecter leans down, grabbing hold of Will's hand. Then, everything goes black.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Here's chapter two! This is where we really start to divergent from canon. I hope you guys like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will awakes to the sound of a heart monitor. He cracks one eye open to the oppressive fluorescent lights of a hospital. His head aches.

“Good morning, Mr. Graham.” comes an unfamiliar voice, and Will fights to sit up.

A tall, thin alpha wearing a crisp blue dress shirt with a red tie beneath his stark white lab coat is entering the room. He’s shuffling through papers as he reaches Will’s bed.

“You gave us all quite a fright. Are you feeling better?”

“What happened?” Will asked. “I went into shock?”

The doctor snorts.

“No, not shock, though the stress certainly played a role.” He clears his throat. “Mr. Graham, when was your last heat?”

Will bristles. “I’m a beta.”

“That’s not what our labs are showing.” The doctor says brightly. “This is a classic case of suppressant resistance, Mr. Graham. Are you familiar with the term?”

“*I’m a beta* .” Will says again.

The doctor sighs.

“Mr. Graham, do you know what happens when an omega doesn’t have a heat for a prolonged period of time?” He asks. “Their body keeps producing estrogen in an attempt to complete its hormonal cycle, until it produces enough to overcome the progesterone. With each heat that is skipped, the next is substantially more intense, until it is something that suppressants are no match for. Omegas have *died* from suppressant abuse, Mr. Graham.”

Will says nothing.

“In any case,” The doctor sighs, relenting. “If you’ve never had a heat before, you’ve just had your first. When you arrived, your estrogen levels were nearing toxicity, so we administered an injection to taper them down, ending your heat. But you can expect a second one in the next three months, and you can expect it to be severe. You’re an omega, Mr. Graham.”

Will’s heart pounds in his chest “Are you going to tell anyone?”

The doctor nods sympathetically, his lips pulling into a tight smile. “We’re required by law to let the authorities know so that your gender marker can be changed.”

Will feels tears burn his eyes. “Then, what now?”

The doctor ran hand through his gel-slick hair. “Do you have any living family, Mr. Graham?”

Will shakes his head. “My father died last year, he was all the family I had left.”

The doctor takes a breath. “Any cousins, aunts or uncles?”

“None that I know of.” Will answers. “Are you going to send me to auction?”

“Not if we don’t have to, Mr. Graham.” The doctor answers, giving a reassuring smile. “Typically, family members are given priority for guardianship, but if that’s not an option, arrangements can be made to consider any alpha with an established relationship to the omega. Is there anyone who might be willing to take you in, even temporarily.”

Will hesitates.

“A partner? A friend? Anyone you trust, Mr. Graham.”

“I’m afraid my life has always been lacking in trustworthy people.” Will mutters. “What happens if we can't find anyone?”

The doctor sighs. “If no one is found, you’ll be assessed to be suitable for auction, and then auctioned off to an eligible alpha.”

“And if I’m not found suitable?”

Something flashes in the doctor’s eyes

“Listen to me, Will.” He warns. “That is by far your worst option. If you are found unsuitable you will become a ward of the state, and go to a state home for omegas. Depending on your placement, you may not be allowed outside. Since you have no blood relatives, you definitely won’t be allowed visitors. You would be better off at auction.”

Will swallows, looking down. He twists his blanket, watches as it shakes in his hands. The room felt cold and far away, as if he would wake up at any moment, sweaty in his bed. He exhales slowly.

“Maybe there’s someone.” Will offers, unsure.

The doctor reaches into the pocket of his coat, pulling out Will's cell phone.

"I pulled this out of the safe for you." He says, handing it to the omega. "I'll give you some time to yourself, see if anyone would be willing to take guardianship, even just temporarily. If someone you know can keep you for a little while, you may be able to find an alpha through courting instead of auction"

The doctor pauses for a moment, considering what to say.

"Good luck, Mr. Graham."

And with that he leaves.

Will flips open his phone, scrolling through his contacts.

He hovers over "Bloom, Alana," the second number after triple A. Then, he shakes his head. He can't rope Alana into this, he likes her too much. Besides, she's a beta, so she probably wouldn't be eligible since the two weren't blood related. He scrolls down.

"Crawford, Jack." Will shudders. He had no idea how the alpha would react to this. Plus, he knew the man had a family, a beta wife and children. He probably couldn't take Will in if he wanted to.

He continues scrolling, until he got to the L's.

"Lecter, Hannibal." He'd added the number just a few days before. Now, this is something. The psychiatrist works with omegas- he'd probably know of some resources Will could use. Will presses the call button.

Dr. Lecter picks up on the first ring.

"Will?" He asks, his voice colored with concern. "How are you? You had us all worried."

"I'm okay, Dr. Lecter." Will responds, trying to sound collected. "I may need your help with something, though."

"What's that?"

Will swallows.

"I. Um." He falters, his cheeks burning at just the thought of saying the words out loud. "I went into heat."

Dr. Lecter was quiet.

"I- it turns out I was an omega the whole time!" Will says, giving a breathy, nervous laugh. "Talk about a late bloomer."

"Will." Dr. Lecter replies, his tone icy.

Will swallows.

“You will need a guardian.” The doctor says.

“Yes.” Will replies. “I- I don’t have any family left.”

The line was quiet.

“You are on the gynecology floor?” Dr. Lecter asks.

“I’d imagine so.”

“I’ll be there in a moment.” Dr. Lecter said. And the line went dead.

It was no more than fifteen minutes before Will heard the doctor’s accent in the hall, asking for his room. Will shrinks in his bed when the alpha rushes through the door, looking at the omega with concern.

The doctor approaches his bed slowly.

“Late presentation?” He asks.

Will nods.

“Because it carries all the signs of suppressant abuse.” The doctor notes dryly.

Will swallows.

“And you have no one?” Dr. Lecter asks.

“I was hoping you could help with that.” Will replies.

Dr. Lecter sighs. “That is not an easy ask, William. You’ve no family, and we both know you have precious few friends.”

“Isn’t there something else?” Will asks. “Like a third option?”

“There’s auction.”

“Not that.”

“There are precious little resources for unclaimed omegas.” Dr. Lecter answers. “It’s a demographic that’s not supposed to exist.”

“What about emancipation?”

Dr. Lecter shakes his head. “You cannot petition within three months of a major medical episode.”

“Oh.” Will said, feeling tears prick his eyes. He drops his head.

“There is one possibility.” Dr. Lecter says.

Will looks up at the doctor.

“I am a well off, unmated alpha.” Dr. Lecter says slowly. “As your psychologist, we have an established relationship, and the courts would probably appreciate my expertise on the omega psyche for a case such as yours.”

Will squirms.

“Under my roof, however, you would follow my rules.” The doctor warns. “You would be expected to contribute to my household in an appropriate way, and you would not be permitted to speak to me as flippantly as you have thus far."

Will is quiet for a long while.

“What would that entail?” he asks finally.

“We would meet before a judge to settle your custody." Hannibal replies. "And then you would come home with me.”

“And there I would stay?”

“Ideally.”

“What about emancipation?” Will asks. “After three months?”

Dr. Lecter sighs.

“It would not be like you think, Will.” He says gravely. “You would not have your job at the academy back. You would be lucky to make minimum wage. You would live under the supervision of a case manager, and if anything slips- your rent, your power bill, your *health* - you would be right back where you started, facing auction.”

Will winces.

“I suppose I don’t have much of a choice.” Will says bitterly.

“Better the devil you know.” Dr. Lecter advises. “I would not be unkind. I would provide for you.”

“And you would fuck me?” Will spits. “You would put your bite in me, and collar me, and drag me around as your little fuck toy?”

“I would do nothing until you were ready.” Hannibal swears. “I would hold you after your nightmares, I would keep you safe and warm, and lavish you with the finest things.”

“If I didn’t know better I’d say you had a crush on me, Dr. Lecter.” Will says bitterly.

The doctor smirks.

“You interested me from the moment I laid eyes on you, William.” He admits. “It would please me greatly to have you.”

Will is quiet for a long while.

“I don’t suppose there’s any other way.”

Dr. Lecter shakes his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Then I suppose," Will says, drawing in a breath. "I am grateful for your kindness, Doctor.”

*

The next few days are a blur. Hannibal visits his hospital room daily, a lawyer in tow, to discuss his custody- conversations that don’t involve Will speaking often. Will is advised not to speak during the hearing, to follow a step behind Hannibal, and to keep his eyes cast downward, so that he looks obedient and tame.

“The judge will be aware of his suppressant abuse.” Hannibal’s lawyer explains (to Hannibal, not Will.) “So he will already think of him as rebellious. It’s important to show that you have a handle on him.”

The next Monday, Hannibal arrives with a change of clothes, and in the next hour they’re sitting in a court room, waiting for their case to be called.

No one speaks to Will during the hearing. Hannibal’s lawyer presents the doctor’s credentials, explaining his expertise in omega psychology, showing his assets.

“Your honor, this is an alpha who could provide a life of safety, stability, and even luxury for this omega.” The lawyer concludes, his fist clenched dramatically over his chest. “After the tumultuous life Mr. Graham has lived, I don’t think we could ask for a better ending to this omega’s story.”

The judge asks Hannibal a few questions, and then, with a bang of the gavel, Will belongs to Hannibal, and the alpha walks him away from the bench, a hand on his shoulder.

Will is ushered from Hannibal’s rental car to the airport shuttle, into the plane for their flight to Baltimore, then into Dr. Lecter’s expensive, luxurious car for the ride home. Dr. Lecter kept one hand on the omega the entire afternoon, which Will found increasingly grating, But he said nothing.

They pulled through the gate at Dr. Lecter’s manor around 9 in the evening, the doctor parking in front of the house’s grand entrance. Dr. Lecter unbuckles his seat belt and exits the car, and Will finds himself annoyed to realize the child locks were activated on his side.

Will growls as the doctor opens his door, pushing past him and making his way to the manor’s door, where he was stopped again to wait for Dr. Lecters key.

“Rules.” The doctor says flatly as the pair passed through the door. He takes a seat in a plush armchair in the foyer, and gestures for Will to take the seat opposite.

“First,” Dr. Lecter begins. “You will rise each day no later than eight AM. You will join me for breakfast, where you will eat by my side on your knees. You will eat all your meals from my hand, on your knees.”

Will balks. “Don’t you think that’s a bit old-fashioned, doctor?”

“Not at all.” The doctor smiles easily. “Omegas who are hand-fed by their alphas tend to have stronger bonds and less anxiety. It’s found that hand-feeding an omega at dinner can even reduce nightmares. It promotes oxytocin and reduces the omega’s cortisol levels.”

Will rolls his eyes. “What else?”

“You are to speak respectfully to me.” The alpha says. “And you are to refer to me properly.”

“Would that be ‘sir,’ ‘alpha,’ or ‘almighty?’” Will snarks. Hannibal’s lips tighten.

“If it is where you’re comfortable starting, sir or alpha will do for now.” the doctor responds. “But I would like for you to call me ‘Daddy’ when you’re ready.”

Will’s mouth goes dry. “You can’t be serious!”

“It may seem silly.” Dr. Lecter chuckles. “But, it’s been found that omegas who refer to their alpha by more affectionate terms tend to build trust faster and more reliably. ‘Daddy’ was found to be the most effective.”

“Have you ever heard of ‘sampling bias,’ Dr. Lecter?” Will huffs. “How many of those omegas were former homicide detectives?”

Dr. Lecter ignores this.

“Third.” He continues. “You will be trained for an hour each day when I return from work. You will engage respectfully and earnestly, or you will be punished.”

“Trained like a dog?” Will scoffs.

“Trained like an omega.”

“And you’re going to punish me?” Will asks with a shake of his head. “I thought you’d be above corporal punishment as a man of science.”

“Corporal punishment is ineffective for *children* .” Dr. Lecter corrects. “The evidence is conflicting for adult omegas, but I’ve found it useful in my own practice.”

“You’ve punished omegas in your practice?” Will asks. Dr. Lecter laughs.

“A few times, yes. Though, I usually instruct their alphas to do so.” He answers. “To be honest, I’m getting close to punishing an omega right now.”

Will blinks. “What do you mean?”

Dr. Lecter laughs again. “Do you think I’ve missed your snide remarks? Or the fact that you’ve yet to address me properly a single time during this conversation?”

Will’s voice goes quiet. “I’m talking to you the way I always talk to you.”

“And I’ve already told you, that is no longer acceptable.”

Will swallows, saying nothing.

“I would be willing to show you some leniency, if you apologize.”

“I’m sorry.” Will says with a roll of his eyes.

“Oh, we both know that won’t do.” Hannibal sighs rising from his chair.

He snaps his fingers, pointing to the ground in front of him.

“Kneel in front of me, and apologize properly. *Address* me properly.”

Will swallows, he grips the arms of his chair. He looks down, saying nothing.

“You’ve got until the count of three.” Hannibal warns

Will doesn’t move. He’s not sure what it is that keeps him still: defiance, shame, or fear.

“One.” Hannibal begins.

Will keeps his eyes on the floor, studying the intricate patterns of the rug before him.

“Two.”

He swallows again. His hands fidget. He still doesn’t move.

“Three.” Hannibal finishes, and storms over to the omega.

He grabs Will by the collar of his shirt and hoists him out of the chair, taking the seat for himself. Will yelps as he bends the omega over his knee, closing his other leg behind the omega’s thighs so that he couldn’t wrench away. Then, he’s pulling down the omega’s pants, and Will starts to panic as he feels the cool air of the foyer against his ass as Dr. Lecter pulls down his underwear.

“What are you doing?” He cries. He reaches backward with his hand- the one that isnt pressed into the alpha’s abdomen– and tries to pull his shirt down or his pants back up, but the alpha grabs the arm by the wrist and pins it painfully against the omega’s back.

“I’m going to show what happens to a bratty omega in my care.” Dr. Lecter says simply. “Have you ever been spanked before, Will?”

“Not since I was a kid.” Will says, twisting in the alpha’s grasp.

“Then you will find this *very* enlightening.” Dr. Lecter chirps, relishing the omega’s humiliation. “How many do you think you deserve? 20? 30?”

“Zero!” Will spits.

“We’ll go with 30.” The doctor replies.

The first smack lands on Will’s bare ass and tears spring to his eyes. By the fifth, tears are spilling down his cheeks. The alpha is showing the omega no mercy, each smack seems to hurt more than the last.

“Stop!” Will cries out, trying to twist away. “Let me go!”

“The less you struggle, the easier this will be for both of us.” Hannibal tells him, his pace not slowing at all. “You’ve still got 20 to go.”

The sting in his ass is building. The alpha’s run out untouched skin, so each slap builds on the last. Will realizes with horror that he’s crying- no, bawling in the alpha’s lap, like a child. He begins to panic, thrashing in the alpha’s lap.

The alpha pins Will’s arm tighter behind his back, sending pain shooting through his bad shoulder. Will cries out, his body going still.

“There’s a good boy.” Hannibal coos. “We’re almost done.”

Will says nothing, the pain bringing stars to his vision. He feels pathetic, draped over the alpha’s lap, crying. And then the smacks are over, stopping just as suddenly as they began

“Shh,” Hannibal coos, rubbing his hand over the omega’s back. “You’re okay. It’s over now.”

Will says nothing, focusing on calming his breathing. The alpha allows him his time, waiting until he is only sniffling to speak.

“Stand up, Will.”

Will rises, slowly, trying to tug his pants over his sore ass.

“Drop your trousers.” Hannibal says sharply. A sob breaks from Wills throat.

He drops the pants, kicking off his shoes, and steps out of them, leaving his shoes, socks, pants and underwear in a heap on the floor.

“Go stand by the other chair.” The alpha commands.”Put your hands on the arms and bend over.”

A whine breaks from Will’s throat, he looks at the alpha over his shoulder.

“ *Now.”* the doctor warns. “Unless you need to be convinced further.”

Will sighs and makes his way to the chair, bending over the way the alpha instructed

“Remove your shirt, Will.” Hannibal commands.

Will unbuttons his shirt, another sob breaking from him as the cold air hits his skin. He drops it on the floor.

“That’s a good boy.” The alpha coos. “Did you learn your lesson?”

“Yes, alpha.” Will responds, his voice still thick with tears.

“And are you sorry?”

“Yes, alpha.”

“Good boy.” Hannibal hummed. “Come here, kneel in front of me.”

Will turns, beginning to make his way to the alpha, but Hannibal stops him.

“No.” He says. “Crawl.”

Will drops to his knees with a sob. He crawls on all fours towards the alpha, thanking his luck for the plush rug beneath him. He stops when he is at the alphas feet.

“Good boy.” Hannibal murmurs. He leans forward, so that he and the omega are face to face. “I want you to apologize, Will. Repeat after me. ‘I’m sorry for being disrespectful, Daddy. I will not do it again.’”

“I- I’m sorry for being disrespectful.” Will chokes out, looking down. “I won’t do it again.”

“Oh, Will.” Hannibal tuts. “You aren’t really going to push your luck further?”

Will chokes back a sob.

“I’m sorry for being disrespectful, Daddy.” He says, tears blurring his vision. “I- I won’t do it again.”

“Good enough.” Hannibal smiles. He leans back in his chair and pats his thigh. “Come here.”

Will doesn’t move, trembling in his spot on the floor. He looks up at the alpha, searching his face.

“Come sit on Daddy’s lap.” the alpha says, by way of explanation. “Let me hold you.”

Will rises, sitting gingerly in the alpha’s lap. He feels odd, uncomfortable. He doesn’t think he’d been so close to another person in his adult life.

“There’s a good boy.” Hannibal coos. “Put your arms around daddy’s neck.”

Will reaches up to anchor himself on the alpha’s neck. Images flash in his brain- He sees Garret Jacob Hobbs straddling Elise Nichols in her bed. He wraps his hands around her throat, and Will breaks down in sobs, head pressed against Hannibal’s chest.

“That’s my good boy.” Hannibal murmurs, wrapping his arms around the omega and pulling him close. “Tell me Will, when was the last time you cried?”

Will inhales shakily. He can’t remember the last time he cried. He certainly can’t remember ever crying like this.

“It’s been a while.” He says finally,

Hannibal hums. “You know, Will, crying can be very cathartic for omegas. The opportunity to break down, to be shown it will all be taken care of even if they break, it’s all but necessary.”

“Everything tends to fall apart one by one when I break, Dr. Lecter.” Will says bitterly.

“ *Alpha* .” the doctor corrects. “And it’s by far time that’s changed.”

The alpha shifts, pressing a kiss to the omega’s scalp.

“You’ve spent an awfully long time being brave, Will.” The alpha says softly, stroking the omega’s back. “You have seen things that would break *alphas* , let alone omegas. You’re going to have to learn to be soft, you’re going to have to learn how to be cared for. I don’t expect it to be easy for you.”

Will huffs against the alpha’s shoulder.

“I’m more of the type to care than to be cared for.” He says. “I prefer it.”

“Such a sad way for an omega to think.” The alpha tuts. “I wonder what’s left you so scared.”

Will snorts. “Scared? Only a moment ago you called me brave.”

“Bravery and fear are two sides of the same coin.” The alpha responds. “You can’t have one without the other.”

Will scoffs. “I don’t have time to be scared.”

“You’ve got plenty of time now.” The alpha sighs. “We’ll untangle this mess, my sweet boy. One string at a time.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. As always, comments and kudos appreciated.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will is relieved to be given a room to himself in the alpha's home. The room is large, with gorgeous bay windows overlooking the doctor's estate. It even has its own bathroom. All of it is furnished with the same lavish blue, greys, and purples of the rest of the home.

"These quarters are your own." Hannibal had told him as he left the omega in the room the night before. "Later, we can personalize them a bit more, customize them to your tastes. But, for now, I want you to understand that this space is yours."

The alpha had allowed Will to retire to his room after his punishment, but the omega has barely slept. The plush blankets of his bed are too unfamiliar, nothing has his scent. Each time he drifts off he wakes in a cold sweat no more than an hour later- stirred awake by the image of another dead omega, floating above him.

Finally, he sits up, shivering. He's covered in sweat, his brown curls stuck to his forehead. He glances at the digital alarm clock next to his bed: 4:26 AM.

He sighs, and rises from the bed. He was provided a set of pajamas by the alpha, the old fashioned kind with button up shirts, where the top and bottom match. The shirt had never made its way onto his body, and the pants were discarded next to his bed after the second nightmare, leaving Will in nothing but his boxers. There's a plush bathrobe hanging on the back of his bedroom door, though, so Will pulls it on and slides out the door.

He's not sure what he's meaning to do. Maybe he'll go outside and get some fresh air, or maybe just wander the house, since he's still yet to see most of it. When he reaches the bottom of the stairs, however, he sees a light on in the kitchen.

He can hear the sounds of cooking, the sizzle of oil, the scrape of a pan. It smells delicious, whatever the alpha is making. He enters the kitchen.

The alpha is cooking, still in pajamas. His sleeves are rolled to his elbows, an apron tied around his waist. He stands at the island, his head bowed as he attends a pot on the stove.

"You're up early." He says, not looking up.

"I couldn't sleep." Will replies softly.

"Yes." The alpha says, still not looking up. "Nightmares."

It's not a question. Will swallows.

“I’m sorry if I disturbed you.” Will says. “I didn’t think my tossing and turning was that loud.”

“*Ne*,” Doctor Lecter replies. “Not the sound, the *scent.* ”

The alpha pours the contents of the pot through a colander, then dumps it onto a wooden cutting board. He grabs a knife from the block next to the stove and begins to mince.

“I could smell the distress coming off of you all night.” He says, still not looking at the omega. “Even from my room, it was overwhelming.”

“I appreciate the self-restraint.” Will deadpans. “I’m sure the alpha thing to do would’ve been to kick down the door and rock me to sleep, or something.”

The alpha snorts.

“Of course not.” He responds. “To intrude on you like that would’ve destroyed the minuscule amount of trust we’ve managed to build.”

“Destroyed it more than pulling my pants down and spanking me?” Will spits.

Hannibal sighs.

“It’s quite the opposite, Will.” He says softly. “When you retired last night, I told you you were to have a room to yourself, and that you would be left alone until morning. If I intruded on you, it would’ve shown you that my word was not trustworthy.”

“Conversely,” The alpha continues. “When we arrived home I told you how you were to address me, and you chose to ignore it. If I didn’t correct you, what reason would you have to trust anything I say?”

“I find it easier to trust people who *haven’t* assaulted me, Dr. Lecter.” Will sneers.

The alpha stills, looking up from his work to stare the omega down.

“Careful, William.” He warns. Will swallows.

The pair are quiet for a while. Will watches the alpha as he works.

He’s pulled a metal bowl forward from its place further back on the island, and removed the cloth covering the top. From it, he pulls a mound of dough, which he rolls against a second wooden cutting board, sprinkled with flour. He rolls it into a thin, snake-like shape, then pulls it into four equal sections. He pats each section flat, and spoons the meat from the other cutting board on top of them. Then, he folds them over, trapping the meat inside.

“What are you making?” Will asks.

“*Žemaičių blynai*.” The alpha answers. “Samogitian pancakes. They’re a traditional dish from Lithuania, my homeland. The dough is made from potato, egg, and flour, then filled with meat and fried.”

As the alpha says this, he places the four dough patties in a pan of hot oil, one by one. They begin to sizzle, Will's mouth waters.

"It smells amazing." He says.

"There's plenty for you, if you would like." The alpha offers.

"Will I have to eat it on my knees on the floor?"

"Yes," The alpha sighs. "All your meals will be eaten by my side from your knees, so long as I am present."

"Then go away."

The alpha snorts at this, despite himself.

"It makes you nervous," The alpha asks, flipping the contents of the pan. "When someone else is in charge?"

Will scoffs.

"Not at all." He retorts. "As a detective, I was always taking orders from someone overhead. I had no problem taking orders from Crawford, either. Even at the academy, I had to submit my syllabus for review, I wasn't in charge of my schedules. It's not that I have a problem being told what to do, it's the complete lack of dignity. Being exposed, at the complete disposal of someone else, it's-"

"It's the vulnerability." Hannibal says. "It scares you, to think what they could do."

Will swallows.

"Most omega murder victims are killed by their partners." He points out, voice quiet.

Hannibal sighs, plating the pancakes. He turns the stove off with a click.

"In your line of work, you saw many, many tragedies." Hannibal says, placing his hands on the counter, leaning against it. "You saw the absolute worst that could happen to an omega, and the absolute worst an alpha could become. You saw it so much, you began to see it everywhere. But the reality is, such cases are rare, in the grand scheme of things. Your life will become much easier if you allow yourself to trust."

Will says nothing, his face pointed away, looking at the floor. The alpha sighs.

"Why don't we try?" Hannibal asks. "There is no one here but you and me. At this hour, I don't believe even God is watching. You've got no reason to be ashamed."

Will falters in his spot. He doesn't want to, but he is hungry. He hasn't eaten since arriving at the alpha's home, and his meals in the hospital were meager. He eyes the alpha, swallowing thickly.

“You might like it.” The alpha offers, smiling warmly. “Many omegas enjoy the tenderness, the attention.”

“I have never been fond of attention.” Will says quietly.

“That's easy to believe.” The alpha responds. He picks up the plates, walks around the island.

“Come, Will.” He says, and leads the pair out of the kitchen.

Hannibal leads Will into the dining room, where a sleek, wooden table stretches through the middle of the room. The room is as gorgeous as the rest of the house, with a fireplace standing next to the table, elephant tusks adorning either side of its mantle. A chandelier hangs above the table, its arms stretching and curling like the antlers of a buck. Cassie Boyle’s body flashes before Will’s eyes, impaled on a rack of antlers. Will’s mouth goes dry.

“Come here, Will.” Hannibal says, pulling the shaken omega from his thoughts. He’s standing at the foot of the table, the plates set on the table behind him.

Will obeys, despite himself, too shaken to protest. Hannibal pulls the chair from the table, turns it to face the omega, and takes a seat. He takes the omega’s hands in his own.

“Just stand for a moment, if that’s what you need.” The alpha says, speaking softly. “Notice the feeling of the floor against your feet, the way the chandelier throws shadows around the room, the smell of the herbs on the wall. We are in no rush.”

Will takes a shaky breath, doing his best to notice each of those things. Cassie Boyle hangs in his peripheral vision, just out of view.

“What are you thinking about, Will?” The alpha asks.

Will tries to speak, but finds his voice too hoarse. He clears his throat.

“Cassie Boyle.” He says finally. “The girl we found in the field, impaled on the antlers.”

Hannibal’s face softens.

"Užjaučiu.” the alpha coos, running his thumbs over the omega’s hands as he holds them. “What’s brought Ms. Boyle to mind, Will?

Will blinks, takes a shuddering breath.

“The- the lamp.” He stutters . “The chandelier. It looks- it’s almost like-”

“Like antlers.” Hannibal finishes. “I’m sorry, Will, there’s nothing I can do about that.”

Will nods, but he’s barely present. His eyes begin to glass over. He loses his balance, stumbling a step backward.

The alpha squeezes his hands.

“Easy, Will.” Hannibals says. “Look at me. Stay here with me. Ms. Boyle is not here. Mr. Hobbs is not here. You are safe, you are here with your alpha. Nothing is going to hurt you.”

Will’s head is spinning, his body tilting from side to side.

“Wasn’t Hobbs.” He mutters.

“What’s that?”

“It- it wasn’t Hobbs who killed her.”

Hannibal takes in a breath.

“In any case, you are not there now.” Hannibal says softly. He squeezes the omega’s hands. “You are here with me, in my dining room. Tell me, how does the floor feel against your feet?”

“It’s… cold.” Will says. He’s looking up, past Hannibal, into the chandelier. His eyes are glassy. “It feels… old. Like it’s weathered.”

“Yes.” Hannibal says. “This house is very old. Do you feel my hands over yours? When I squeeze them? Try to squeeze them back.”

Will ignores this.

“We never caught Cassie’s killer.” He chokes. “He- He’ll probably never get caught.”

“Can you take a deep breath for me Will? In and out, like this?” The alpha demonstrates for him, breathing in and out with a whooshing noise.

“I think I’m going to fall.” Will says. He stumbles backward.

“Here, get down on the floor.” The alpha says softly. He takes Will by the elbows and lowers him down. Will follows without complaint, sitting on his knees at the alpha’s feet.

Will sits that way for a while, his cheek leaning against the alpha’s knee. He breathes raggedly. Hannibal sits silently, carding gently through the omega’s hair.

Slowly, Will comes back into himself. First, his breathing slows. The light comes back into his eyes. Then, all at once, he sits up, looking up at the alpha with wide eyes.

“Shh, Will, it’s okay.” The alpha soothes. “You had a flashback, it looks like you dissociated for a moment. Do you remember what happened?”

“I remember we were supposed to eat pancakes.” Will says. The doctor laughs.

“They’re still here, perhaps a little cold.” Hannibal says. “We can follow through on our plan, if you’re still up for it. You are already in position.”

Will swallows, fidgeting in his spot. He says nothing.

“There is nothing to be afraid of.” Hannibal says, cutting a piece off of the pancake for the omega and spearing it on his fork. He lowers it to the omega, one hand hovering below it to catch anything that might fall.

Will hesitates.

“When you’re ready, Will.” The alpha says. “There’s no rush.”

Will leans forward. He opens his mouth tentatively, then closes it. Finally, he takes the bite.

Will moans softly as he bites down. It’s delicious. It would certainly be better if it hadn’t had so much time to cool, but it still retains enough warmth that it’s welcome in Will’s watering mouth. The flavor is splendid, fatty and salty. It’s a perfect comfort food, and Will isn’t surprised that this is the meal he found the alpha preparing for himself on a sleepless night.

“Good boy.” The alpha coos. “Very good. How do you feel?”

“Sweaty.” Will says honestly. “And hungry.”

The alpha laughs.

“You had quite an episode.” Hannibal tells him. “After this, you can have a shower if you like.”

“What happened?” Will asks “I was looking at the lamp, it looked like- like antlers.”

“Enough .*”* Hannibal says sharply. “Stop that. Focus on here and now. How does the food taste?”

“It’s delicious.” He says. “It’s- it’s very rich. Very salty. I see why it would be your pick of choice for a night like this.”

“Lithuanian peasant food.” Hannibal grins. “Lots of butter and potatoes, to get us through the winter.”

“It’s quite the comfort food.”

Hannibal cuts another bite off for the omega, lowering the fork to him the same way as before. Will takes it readily.

“And what is your preferred comfort food, for nights like these?” Hannibal asks. “I know you’ve weathered more than a few of them.”

“Whiskey.” Will says flatly. Hannibal shakes his head.

“That won’t do.” He tuts, lowering another bite to the omega. “Horrible for your sleep. Horrible for your dreams. Omegas are especially sensitive.”

“I suppose I shouldn’t expect to drink much in the future?” Will asks before taking the bite from the alpha’s fork.

“I could be persuaded,” The alpha says, skewering another bite for the omega. “On special occasions.”

“Like?” Will asks as the fork is lowered to him. He takes it readily.

“Birthdays,” The alpha says, bringing the fork back up to cut another bite. “Weddings.”

“I suppose I can expect an entire glass of champagne when our big day rolls around.” Will snarks bitterly. The alpha snorts.

“Don’t tempt me, Will.” The doctor smirks, lowering another forkful down to the omega. “I didn’t anticipate you being one for such an event.”

“I’m not.” Will says flatly, taking the fork into his mouth.

“I am.” The alpha says. “I would love an excuse to dress you up and show you off, but I would never force you through a wedding you didn’t want.”

“So we’re eloping.” Will deadpans. “How romantic.”

The alpha snorts, cutting another piece for the omega.

“You will get used to getting shown off, eventually.” He tells the omega, ignoring the comment. “I love to host, my home is perfect for it. You will be my prize jewel for many a dinner party.”

Will hesitates, the fork lowered in front of his lips.

“And those will be… like this?” He asks.

“All the omegas will be eating at their alpha’s side, from their knees.” Hannibal says, by way of comfort. “No one will pay you any mind, Will.”

Will takes the bite off the fork. He chews it slowly.

“And when we go out?” He asks.

“Plenty of restaurants provide pillows for omegas to kneel on.” Hannibal answers. “Though I don’t eat out much.”

“I wouldn’t either if I cooked like this.” Will says, and Hannibal grins.

“How do you feel, Will?” The alpha asks.

“Fine.” Will says. “A little cold.”

“You’ve just finished your first meal from my side, as my omega.” Hannibal informs. “Was it as bad as you thought?”

Will shakes his head.

“I wasn’t expecting you to talk to me like that.” He admits. “Like normal.”

Hannibal smiles.

“You are not the kind of omega I would lavish with praise.” He says. “It seems to embarrass you, it would make you even more difficult to persuade.”

Will feels his face heat up.

“Am I a kind of omega you’ve worked with before?” He asks. “As a patient?”

Dr. Lecter smiles. “Not quite.”

“I have had a few cases of suppressant abuse.” The alpha answers. “So your hyper-independence comes as no surprise. However, I don’t think I’ve ever had a patient with trauma like yours. It’s knitted into every cell in your body. Your every action, every *thought* is speculated by a thousand ghosts.”

The alpha leans close, speaking softly.

“Every time I ask you to do something, I can see it roll through your mind. It has to be held up against everything you’ve experienced, every tragedy you’ve witnessed. ‘ *Is this safe?’* you ask yourself. ‘ *Will this get me hurt?’* It is sad to watch.”

“Feel free to look away.” Will spits. The alpha ignores him.

“When I told you to kneel in front of me last night, it was like you froze completely. I could see all your neurons firing, so confused. You ended up just crumpling in on yourself.”

“It was a bit of an uncharted territory.” Will admits, uneasily.

“I’m sure it was.” The alpha agrees. “To be asked to take such a vulnerable position. Were you afraid I would hurt you, Will?”

Will swallows. He shakes his head. Even after his punishment, he isn’t scared that the alpha would hurt him, not seriously.

“No, I didn’t imagine so.” The alpha responds. “I think you were more worried about the precedent it would set.”

Will says nothing.

“It’s a scary thing.” The alpha offers. “If you do what I say tonight, what might I ask you to do tomorrow?”

Will looks down. He still doesn't respond.

"And that's why you don't like the praise, either." The alpha continues. "Not unless you're frightened. You were even like this with Jack, snarking back to everything he said. Because if we get it in our heads that your aim is to please us, how far might we make you go? Is that right?"

"I wasn't aware that praise was any more agreeable when I was frightened, *doctor."* he spits. Hannibal laughs.

"And there you go again." He says. "You break your rules when you start to feel vulnerable. You want to show me that when it comes down to the wire, I've got no control over you. But, I'm sure if I brought you over my knee again, you'd be relieved to hear me call you a good boy and hold you tight again."

Will growls, curling into himself. He says nothing.

"You fight for the control," Hannibal says. "Because you're scared of what someone else might do with it. You snarl and growl and make a big show so that others will leave you alone and you can tend to matters yourself, but when the fight is over, all you want is to be patted on the head and told no one is angry with you. You are like a dog with its leg in a trap."

"You're like the hunter who sets the trap." Will spits.

"Am I?" The alpha asks. "The hunter doesn't set the trap for the dog. Perhaps there is something bigger I am trying to protect you from."

"I've protected myself from plenty of big beasts just fine."

"Have you?" Hannibal presses. "It seems like quite a few of them got a bite out of you. Some still follow you around to this day."

Will says nothing.

"My goal for you is to heal, Will." Hannibal says. "I want you to be safe, cared for. We are on the same team."

"I play better by myself."

"You *think* you do." Hannibal corrects. "But you were destroying yourself. You're lucky you collapsed when you did and not a week earlier. Who knows how the alpha who picked you up from auction would have ruined you."

"What makes you so sure *you* won't ruin me?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles fondly. He is quiet for a moment.

"Do you remember what I said to you?" He asked. "On the morning of Mr. Hobbs' death? I'm not like Jack. I don't worry about breaking you, Will, I don't see you as fragile. It's clear

to me that you are strong. Perhaps too much so."

Will grunts but says nothing.

"You don't need to be locked away and protected. What you need is to be trained, honed, guided in the right direction. If you will forgive the sentimentality, my entire career has been practice for mating with you. Every moment of my life has prepared me, brought me one step closer to being your alpha."

Will scoffs, but his stomach turns at the thought.

"Well, allow me to remind you that we are not mated yet." Will says sharply.

"Of course." Hannibal says with a smile, and Will is disappointed that is words do not seem to sting as he had hoped they would. "As promised, you will not be forced into anything before you are ready. Your heats are likely still irregular, addled by the suppressants. We will have months to get to know each other."

"And what if 'months' isn't enough time?"

"We will cross that bridge when we get to it, Will." The alpha says, rising from his seat. "Come. The sun is rising, it is time to start our day."

Chapter End Notes

Used some Lithuanian let's hope I didn't embarrass myself too bad:

"Ne"- (na) Lithuanian for "no"

"Žemaičių blynai.- (Zeh-MAY-sha Bly-ny) Explained in the text. A Lithuanian dish consisting of dough made from potato egg and flour. Meat is encased in the dough and the whole thing is pan-fried. This is the recipe I used while writing: https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/food-wine/how-make-zemaiciu-blynai-traditional-lithuanian-potato-dish

Užjaučiu- (OOZH-yow-choo)- Lithuanian expression of sympathy, literally "I am compassionating"

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Wrote this in a midnight fervor between the hours of 2 and 4 AM. Along with the majority of this chapter, I wrote about half of the next chapter, all in a single sitting, totaling 5,107 words. I can only assume I was possessed by some kind of horny ghost.
>
> I hope you all enjoy it as much as I enjoyed writing it. There is proper smut early on in the next chapter. This chapter is mostly smut-adjacent fluff (which is my favorite kind).

Will is allowed some time by himself to shower and dress. When he is done, he pulls the shower curtain back to find a change of clothes neatly folded on the toilet lid. The shirt is light blue and paisley, and finer than any article of clothing he has owned before. The pants are a crisp navy blue, and as he wipes the fog from the mirror, he finds the outfit makes his eyes stand out in a way that makes him feel self-conscious.

He certainly doesn't pass for a beta dressed like this. The shirt hugs his slim figure. The pants, high waisted, accentuate his hips. He tugs at the fabric, tucking and untucking the shirt, wishing for it to swallow him the way his flannels had. He is not used to clothes he cannot hide in.

Finally, he emerges from the bathroom, walking into the hallway from his room. He can hear talking downstairs, the alpha's voice as well as others. They sound familiar. He pauses at the top of the stairs for a moment, listening.

"I do think it's going well," Will can hear Hannibal say, responding to an unheard question. "Though I'm sure Will would disagree with me if you asked him. I unfortunately had to punish him shortly after arriving home last night, which I think has set us back a bit."

Will's face burns, hearing Hannibal speak about him like a child. He grips the banister and leans forward, craning to hear the rest of the conversation.

"I'm sure whatever it was, it was well-earned." comes Jack Crawford's voice. "I think very highly of Will, but he is nothing if not hard-headed."

"Has there been any improvement since?" comes the voice of Alana Bloom. "What makes you think it's going well?"

"We were able to have a very pleasant, early breakfast this morning." Hannibal answers. "He was surprisingly compliant about sitting at my feet. I was very proud of him."

"That certainly is surprising." Alana agrees. "I hope it lasts."

“I’m sure it won’t.” Hannibal laughs. “I expect us to go one step forward and two steps back for a while, at first. Will is so used to living on his own terms, I don’t expect things to move smoothly for a long time”

“Well, I’m certain we couldn’t ask for him to be in better hands, Dr. Lecter.” Jack says.

“Thank you, Jack.” Hannibal responds. “If I can beg your pardon for one moment-”

Hannibal raises his voice, calling to Will at the top of the stairs.

“You’re welcome if you’d like to join us, Will.” He calls. “I’m sure you know it is rude to eavesdrop.”

Will swears under his breath as he pads down the stairs.

He finds Hannibal seated in the foyer. Across from him sit Jack Crawford and Alana Bloom. The pair look uncomfortable, having been overheard by the omega. Alana speaks first.

“It’s nice to see you again, Will.” she says, giving a tight-lipped smile. “You look well.”

Will doesn’t respond, shifting nervously in his spot. He turns to Hannibal. “Is there a reason they’re here?”

Jack and Hannibal exchange looks.

“We were discussing… certain possibilities with Dr. Lecter.” Jack says slowly. Will notices how he hunches in his chair, trying to dwarf his large frame. His voice is not gruff and loud like it usually is; instead, it is quiet and soft. Will recognizes these tactics immediately.

Jack is speaking to him like an omega.

“What possibilities?” Will asks, raising his chin defiantly. He squares his shoulders, trying to appear taller. The alpha straightens slightly.

“I’m sure you know your input was invaluable to us during the Garret Jacob Hobbs case.” Jack says, but he is not looking at Will. He continues, looking at Hannibal. “We came to discuss the possibility of bringing you back into the field, in a purely consultory position, of course.”

Will’s annoyance is dwarfed by the enormity of the suggestion, but he knows Jack is not asking him. He turns to Hannibal.

Hannibal meets the omega’s gaze. His eyes tell him *Wait.* Will swallows, as Hannibal shifts his gaze to Jack.

“If Will is interested in returning to the field,” Hannibal says slowly. “I would not be necessarily opposed.”

“But?” Jack probes.

“But,” Hannibal continues. “I would have to ask for certain stipulations.”

“Of course.” Jack responds easily. He sits back in his seat, straightening his spine to full height, ready to negotiate with the alpha.”

“First,” Hannibal says. “Will must return by 5 pm every day. It’s important that his schedule has a sense of normalcy, of routine. I will not have him racing off to investigations at all hours of the day as he did before; he must return in time to engage in his daily training and have dinner with me.”

“That sounds reasonable to me.” Jack says.

“Second,” Hannibal continues. “I will retain the privilege of calling this arrangement off at any moment. If this starts to interfere with his training or mental health, I will not allow him to continue.”

“Of course.” Jack answers. “And I assure you my team and I will take every available measure to protect him.”

“And third,” Hannibal says finally. “Given that Will and I are still unmated, I will require that he wear a collar denoting myself as his alpha whenever he is in public without me.”

“You have *got* to be kidding me.” Will mutters. Jack disguises a snicker as a cough.

“You are free to decline, Will, but those are my terms.”

Alana speaks up.

“I do want to emphasize that you *are* free to decline, Will.” she says, shuffling papers in her lap. “I know you were reluctant to enter the field in the first place, and I worry it will make your… ”

She falters for an uncomfortable beat. Jack is staring daggers into the side of her face.

“. . . *Adjustment* even more difficult than I’m sure it already is.” She finishes finally. She deliberately avoids Jack’s gaze.

“If we’re discussing potential vocations, I’d much rather have my job at the academy back.” Will ventures. The rest of the room shifts uncomfortably.

“I’m afraid that’s not really an option, Will.” Jack says. “The academy doesn’t even have bathrooms for omegas, it would be unsafe.”

“I had no problem using the alphas’ restrooms before.” Will challenges.

“I don’t think anyone in this room is advocating for you to return to the way you lived *before* , Will.” Jack says, his tone dangerous. Will can’t help shrinking in his spot.

“There are more suitable jobs you could consider instead.” Alana says brightly. “If you’re still interested in teaching, you could tutor kids after school- or, many universities accept

omegas for education degrees."

Will scoffs, the suggestion unbelievably insulting. "I'm not interested in *babysitting* , Alana."

"Of course, Will, I didn't mean to suggest-" color rushes to Alana's cheeks, and she shifts in her seat. "I mean, I agree with Hannibal that a sense of purpose and routine is important for you, but I worry what returning to the field would do to your mental health. There are plenty of other ways to fill your time."

She quickly shuffles through the papers in her lap. "I reached out to the local animal shelter and they said they are *always* looking for volunteers. There are much safer-"

Will cuts Alana off, sure she will be grateful.

"I'd be interested in returning to the field, Dr. Bloom." Will says firmly. "Though I'm not particularly excited about sporting a collar while doing it."

Alana smiles sadly at the omega. "I mean, of course it's up to you, Will. I'm just wondering why you'd have a change of heart."

Will shrugs. "I mean, I got into criminal justice because I wanted to save lives. That's what I was doing as a cop, that's what I was doing at the academy. If this is how I can do it now that… everything has happened, I guess I wanna do it."

"I think it's very admirable, Will," Alana says, the pitying smile still on her lips. "your empathy and compassion for others. But I worry sometimes; if you're taking care of everybody else, who's going to take care of you?"

"Dr. Lecter is going to take care of Will." Jack says flatly.

"Sure." Alana grants. "But even *allowing* that is difficult for Will. And we know the field work isn't easy, either. Is it wise to pile on so many challenges at once?"

"That is where I disagree with you, Dr. Bloom." Hannibal retorts. "I'm sure you can find plenty of reasons to worry about Will, especially with the revelation of his omega status. However, I have found that the fastest way to sabotage an omega's growth is to protect them so thoroughly that you shield them from life itself. The last thing I would want is for Will to feel trapped."

"But don't you think engaging with his community in a more positive way would be more beneficial?" Alana asks.

"The two are not mutually exclusive." Hannibal responds. "Will will have plenty of opportunities to get to know his community simply from living under my roof, and I would be more than happy for him to continue any of the activities he previously enjoyed, so long as he earns the privilege."

Alana sits back in her seat, resigned. "Of course, I'll support Will in whatever decision he makes. I just anticipate it to be challenging if he returns to the field."

Jack speaks up, slapping his palms on the tops of his thighs to get the room's attention.

"Well, what do you say Will? Are you up for a little challenge?"

"I'm up for getting out of this house now and again." Will snarks.

"Then it's decided."

*

The collar arrives that afternoon, and Hannibal calls Will into the foyer when it does. Will grimaces when he sees the long, rectangular box in the alpha's hands. It's a hinged box, upholstered in a fine black leather, the company's name is scrawled on the top of the box in a golden script so intricate that Will can't even begin to make out what it actually says. Aside from shape, it reminds Will of the boxes engagement rings come in.

"I tried to pick something understated." Hannibal says, opening the box. "I thought you'd prefer a more masculine design."

The collar is a thin strip of leather. It is a deep blue, not quite navy, but more sapphire. Towards one end, near the buckle, is a golden D-ring, meant to secure any overhanging leather when the collar is fastened, but Will notices it seems thick enough to support a leash. From the middle hangs a golden, oval tag about the size of a quarter. The tag is simple, lacking the inset gems that are popular in these sorts of things. Instead, it's a plain gold, about 10 millimeters thick, with a tiered border. The light reflects white on some sort of engraved message in the center.

Will frowns, lifting the small pendant so that the light no longer obscures the engraving:

Will Graham

omega in the custody of

Hannibal Lecter.

Will meets Hannibal's gaze.

"I'm sure you're unhappy with it." Hannibal says flatly. "Just as I'm sure you would be unhappy with any collar I presented you. I am only asking you to tolerate it while you are in public without me present."

Will huffs. "If it means I can go back to work, it'll do."

"That's a good boy." Hannibal smiles, ignoring how the words make Will sneer. "Come, let's make sure it fits."

Will wants to object as Hannibal steps behind him, but he can't find the words before he feels the collar wrap around the front of his throat. The inside of the collar is a deep blue velvet, which feels soft against Will's skin. The alpha secures the collar, slipping two fingers beneath it to ensure it isn't too tight. As he withdraws his hand, his fingers brush Will's scent gland, and the omega all but jumps away from the alpha to end the contact.

Hannibal pretends not to notice, grabbing Will by the shoulders to square the omega in front of himself.

"Hold still, Will, let me see."

The alpha smiles warmly as he takes in the sight. He lifts the tag gingerly.

"It suits you." He says fondly. "Very handsome."

"Can I take it off now, please?"

Hannibal laughs. "Okay, sweet boy, you can take it off."

And Will makes quick work of removing it, nearly flinging it at the alpha, who takes it with a roll of his eyes.

"Listen to me, Will." Hannibal says as he places the collar back into the box. "I expect you to take very good care of this. If it is damaged or lost, I am going to be angry. If I find out you are not wearing it when you should be, I will be furious. You should expect to be punished if either of those things occur."

Will shudders at the thought, recalling the previous night's spanking.

"You don't have to worry about that." Will mutters. "I know when not to push my luck."

"It would be quite the relief if you did." Hannibal snorts as he snaps the lid shut. He hands the box to Will. "Take it to your room. You're free to use your time however you choose for the next few hours. In the meantime, I will be taking care of some work in my office. I will come get you for training at 5."

*

Will places the collar, still in its box, on the polished oak dresser in his room, then flops onto his bed. He's exhausted from the lack of sleep, though that's not really new. What's new is having the free time to do something about it.

He twists on top of his covers, feeling too finely dressed to crawl beneath them. The day has been slow and lazy, mostly spent wandering the alpha's house, hoping not to run into him. At noon, the alpha served him lunch as he sat on the floor. The meal was quieter than this morning's breakfast, Will avoiding the alpha's attempts to engage him in conversation. He ate less than half the meal, claiming not to be hungry, and relished the disappointment on the alpha's face when he allowed the omega to leave the dining room.

From there, Will had begun actively avoiding the alpha, listening for his footsteps as he wandered from room to room. He'd tried every exterior door he found, only to find each one of them locked. The knobs were old, with ornate, victorian style keyholes instead of the deadbolts he expected to see. He was sure the alpha kept the keys somewhere secure, anticipating the omega to be a flight risk, and he was sure he wasn't wrong.

It made his skin crawl to feel locked inside all day, watching the rain beat against the foggy windows of the alpha's estate. It frustrated him further that he was sure the alpha would oblige him if he asked to go outside. He hated that everything seemed to be taken from him and placed just out of reach, so that he could no longer do anything without asking for help. This, he realized with a churn of his stomach, was the indignity of the omega.

He turns these things over his mind as rain beats against the bay windows of his room. Without meaning to, he finds himself falling asleep on top of his blankets, still dressed in the fine day clothes of the alpha.

He dreams that he sits on his knees at the alpha's feet. The dimensions of the dining room begin to warp, so that the alpha's chair stretches towards the sky like a tree. Suddenly, Will is jerked upward by his throat. His hands fly wildly to his neck, and he feels the velvet of the inside of the collar as he pulls at his noose. His head turns to see the alpha, now enormous, examining him with a distant interest.

The alpha's eyes drift downward, and Will's gaze follows. Below him lay a pile of bodies: dead omegas. He recognizes Cassie Boyle, Lying on top with puncture wounds dotting her naked body. He grits his teeth and faces the alpha, who drops the rope he holds him by. Will screams as he falls into the bodies below.

"Will, wake up."

Will starts awake. His hand flies forward to strike the intruder, but is grabbed before it meets its mark.

Hannibal is kneeling next to Will's bed, one hand on his shoulder, the other holding his wrist firmly. His expression is unreadable. Will swallows.

"I'm sorry." He says, trying to pull his hand away. "I was dreaming."

Hannibal is quiet for a beat before releasing the omega's wrist.

"It's alright." Hannibal breathes. "You seemed to be having quite the nightmare. Do you often react this way when you are woken up?"

Will sits up with a shrug. "I'm not often woken up. Or, I wasn't before."

"It's not uncommon." Hannibal says, rising. "For those with PTSD to react with violence when awakened. It's typically seen in combat veterans."

"You think I have PTSD?"

Hannibal snorts. “It is a miracle you had evaded the diagnosis for so long.”

He offers the omega a hand to help him up from the bed.

“Would you like to discuss your dream before we begin training?”

Will shakes his head violently, standing from the bed without the alpha’s help.

“It might help, Will.” Hannibal says, withdrawing his hand. “I would hate for our first training session to be spoiled by a bad dream.”

“I’m sure I’ll find a way to spoil all our training sessions no matter how I sleep.” Will spits. “Let’s just get it over with.”

Hannibal leads Will to his office, a spacious room with a sleek, L-shaped desk in one corner. Against the wall sits a modern purple couch with a plush grey throw across the back. On the ground is a plush rug with an ornate pattern etched in blues and greys. The alpha faces the omega.

“Do you have any questions before we begin?” Hannibal asks. Will shifts uncomfortably.

“I really have no idea what any of this entails.” Will admits, eyes cast down. “I don’t know what you mean by ‘training,’ I can’t picture anything but you holding a handful of treats over my head like a dog. I can’t imagine any of this is going to be tolerable, let alone enjoyable for me, and I can’t help but wonder if it’s all an excuse to humiliate me again the way you did last night.”

“I think that point of view is understandable,” Hannibal says gently, “Given your history. If it helps, I will not be bribing you with treats like a dog.”

Hannibal gives a small chuckle at this, and heat rises to Will’s cheeks. He turns away, looking at the couch to his side.

“For a point of reference,” Hannibal continues. “Training will be much like therapy in a lot of ways, perhaps a bit more tactile. We will discuss my expectations for you, as they evolve over time, and practice exercises to strengthen our bond as alpha and omega. We will go as slowly as you need us to, it is not a place for brute force.”

Will grunts, shifts in his spot. He looks over his shoulder at the door, ajar in its frame. He swallows the urge to run.

Hannibal sighs, taking a seat on the purple couch. He beckons to the omega.

“Come here, Will.” Hannibal says, patting the seat next to him.

Will sits without a word, still not looking at the alpha.

“May I touch you?” Hannibal asks, and Will shrugs, looking away.

Hannibal places his hand gently over the omega's, balled into a fist on his thigh. Will swallows thickly but doesn't not wrench away.

"You seem very preoccupied with the events of last night." Hannibal says softly. "Why don't we talk about it?"

Neither speak for a moment so long that Will thinks he might explode. Then he says everything at once, his words tripping over each other.

"I can't believe you would do that to me." Will spits bitterly, trembling as he speaks. "You keep saying you know that it's difficult for me and you don't want to force me into anything, and- and then you turn around and do *that* . How can- Why would- How am I supposed to just go through that kind of thing and- and just, if I don't like it, too bad? It's not fair! It's humiliating!"

Hannibal takes a breath before speaking.

"I know much of life feels unfair when you're an omega. Tell me Will, how did it feel to go over my knee?"

Tears burn Will's eyes.

"I hated it! I felt so small and useless. I couldn't believe how easy it was for you, too. I was so ashamed of myself for being overpowered so easily."

"It is natural for an alpha to be stronger than an omega." Hannibal says. "One side of that, surely, is discipline, but the other is protection. Would you like to feel protected, Will?"

Will scoffs. "I keep telling you I don't *need* to be protected, *Dr. Lecter."*

"Careful." Hannibal warns. "That is the second time today. If there is a third, you will find last night's events repeating sooner than you'd like."

Will says nothing, glaring into the intricate patterns of the rug.

Hannibal sighs, shifting to cross his legs as he sits.

"You insist on independence," Hannibal notes. "Yet I know from your profile that you were far from satisfied when you had it. Don't you wonder if this change might be for the best after all?"

"No." Will says flatly.

"Not even a little bit?" Hannibal presses. "Surely you can imagine some way to be happy under my care. I could provide you with a lavish life if you wished."

"I was happy that you let me return to doing field work." Will relents.

"Yes," Hannibal smiles. "I could tell. I know you value your freedom, Will, and I am happy to afford it to you, so long as it does not interfere with your safety."

Will says nothing.

“What else would make you happy?” Hannibal asks, squeezing the omega’s hand.

Will is quiet for a moment.

“I miss my dogs.” He says, and Hannibal groans.

“I *knew* you were going to bring up the dogs.” He laughs. “I told Alana not to mention them this morning, but it was only a matter of time.”

“You sent them to a shelter?” Will asks, and Hannibal shakes his head.

“Alana agreed to watch them for the time being.” He says. Then, reluctantly, he adds. “I spoke with a contractor while you were in the hospital about building a shelter for them on the property. If you prove yourself trustworthy enough to be allowed free reign of the grounds, I would be willing to follow through with it.”

Will lights up at that. “Really? How soon?”

“The construction would take at least a month.” Hannibal says. “And in the meantime, I would expect that you apply yourself to the task of earning my trust.”

“Which means training?” Will groans. Hannibal laughs.

“Which means training.” He confirms.

“You still haven’t even told me what that means.”

“We could begin now.” Hannibal says. “All I had planned for today was some simple scent marking, a small practice of intimacy.”

Will shifts, curling into himself.

“Have you ever been scented before, Will?”

Will swallows.

“My dad was an alpha.” He says. “He made sure to stink me up before sending me to school.”

“So you have some idea of how it works?”

Will shrugs.

Hannibal shifts to face the omega, who looks pointedly away.

“There are a few scent glands on the human body.” Hannibal explains, rolling up his sleeves. “The least intrusive are found on the wrists. May I see your hands Will?”

Will offers his hands to the alpha shakily, palms up, as he looks down at his lap.

The alpha deftly loosens the buttons on the omega's sleeves, neatly folding his sleeves up to his elbows. He places his own hands, palms down, on Will's forearms, just in front of his elbows. Will feels a warmth spread from his palms down to his stomach, and panics. Hannibal grips his arms as he tries to pull away.

"Shh, Will, it's okay." The alpha coos. "Tell me, how does it feel?"

"It's warm." Will says quietly. "It tingles. I don't like it."

"Can you look at me, sweet boy?"

Will peels his face up to glare at the alpha's chin.

"In my eyes, please."

Will's gaze makes it to the alpha's cheekbones before he panics. He pulls away, yanking his arms out of Hannibal's grasp. His hands fly upward to cover his mouth. His breathing is ragged, tears sit on the brim of his eyelids, threatening to fall.

"Deep breaths, Will." Hannibal says, running smooth circles over the omega's back. "It's okay, you are safe."

"I'm sorry." Will chokes out, lowering his shaking hands. "I- I don't like it."

"You are not in trouble, Will." Hannibal says. "What don't you like about it?"

Will draws in a ragged breath, tears roll down his cheeks.

"It's too much." He sobs. "I- I don't like to be touched. I usually don't let people touch me."

"Touch is very important in establishing trust between mates, Will." Hannibal says softly. "But we can go slower, if that's what you need."

"I- I don't like eye contact either."

"Yes." Hannibal says softly. "Tell me, Will, what's so bad about eyes?"

"It's too *much* ." Will sobs. "I feel like people can see right through me when they look me in the eye, and I can see through them. It's overwhelming. It hurts."

"Your empathy." Hannibal agrees. "It's too much information."

"I thought omega's weren't supposed to make eye contact!" Will says, throwing his hands in the air. "I always thought they got in trouble for that."

Hannibal has to repress a chuckle at that.

"There are definitely instances when it is inappropriate," He affirms. "Such as during a punishment or scolding, and I certainly wouldn't want you to look another alpha in the eye.

At the same time, you cannot build a relationship with someone you are too scared to look at. There was a fascinating study-"

"I am *so* tired of hearing about these studies!" Will spits, facing the alpha with wide eyes. "I am certain there is no sample of omegas that is *vaguely* relevant to me!"

When Will's gaze settles on the alpha, he finds him fighting to keep a smile off his face. Will frowns.

"What's so funny?"

"You know, Will." Hannibal says, reaching for the omega's hand again. He strokes his thumb over Will's knuckles. "It's very interesting how breakthroughs can sometimes look like regression. I know plenty of alphas who would turn their omega over their knee for taking that kind of tone with them, but I am delighted to have broken your walls down far enough to have provoked such a tantrum."

"It wasn't a tantrum." Will pouts, slouching in his spot.

"Of course not." Hannibal coos, voice teasing, and Will laughs despite himself.

"It wasn't a *big* tantrum." The omega bargains.

"It was a very understandable, grown-up tantrum." The alpha allows, and the pair laugh.

The alpha extends his hand to the omega, fingers closed over his upright palm, forearm still bared.

"Let's try again, when you're ready."

"I get to be on top?" Will snarks. Hannibal quirks a brow.

"If you behave yourself." He grins, meeting Will's humor.

Will extends his hand, hovering over the alpha's elbow. His eyes flit upward meeting the alpha's gaze. Hannibal nods.

Will places his wrist on top of Hannibal's, and the tingling sensation begins again. Will wrinkles his nose.

"Why does it feel like that?"

"It's a sign of compatibility." Hannibal explains. "Most people find it pleasant. As our scent glands rub together, they stimulate each other, and our pheromones begin to interact. For compatible pairs, the sensitive nerves in the scent glands race to tell the brain to act on the attraction, which can lead to a tingling feeling, or a warmth. I'm sure it feels very different from your father."

"It didn't feel like anything at all with my father." Will confirms. "Just, like, rubbing elbows."

“Nature tends not to want us attracted to our fathers.”

Will is quiet for a moment, focusing on the sensation. It is pleasant, now that the panic has worn off. The warmth races up through his arm and down his body. He feels the glands on his neck heating up.

“A more intimate location.” Hannibal says, voice low and sultry as he leans forward, “Are the scent glands on the neck. These are the ones bitten during pair bonding, but like all other glands they can be used for simple scenting as well.”

Will meets the alpha’s gaze.

“May I touch your neck, Will?”

Will swallows, then nods, turning his gaze towards the floor. Hannibal leans closer.

Will can feel Hannibal’s breath on his cheek as the alpha pushes his hair behind his ear. He turns his face away, desperate to avoid the alpha’s gaze, and realizes only after the act that he is baring his neck. He fidgets in his seat.

“Good boy, Will, you’re doing great.” Hannibal coos. He runs his thumb across Will’s scent gland, already swollen and wet. A shock runs through the omega and he tenses.

“Shh, Will, *relax.* ” Hannibal says. His voice is soft but it’s an order all the same. Will squirms.

Heat is running through his body, into the pit of his stomach. He can feel his heart hammering against his chest. He swallows, and breathes in.

The alpha’s scent floods his nostrils, and Will is overwhelmed. He feels almost drunk. He lifts his hand and presses lightly on the alpha’s chest.

“Just a moment, Will, you’re doing well.” The alpha whispers into Will’s ear, and a whine breaks from the omega’s throat.

Hannibal ducks his head forward, so that their scent glands are against each other, and Will is trembling. He tries to lean away.

Hannibal places a hand firmly on the omega’s back, locking him in place.

“Just a little bit longer, Will. Be a good boy for me.”

Will swallows, the words sending a shock down his spine, and he squeezes his eyes shut. He counts his breaths, trying to endure.

Finally, alpha pulls away. Before he does, however, he places a chaste kiss on the omega’s neck. A spark shoots down Will’s spine, into his lap, and he pulls away violently. He realizes with horror the effect the alpha has had on his body, and twists away from the alpha, crossing his legs to hide the evidence.

“Will.” Hannibal says.

Will doesn’t respond.

“It is perfectly natural.”

Will deflates all at once, face beet red, head in his hands.

“ *Don’t* .” He groans. “Don’t say it. Oh my god, don’t say it.”

Hannibal laughs. “Will, it is nothing to be ashamed of. It’s a natural response to-”

“Can I leave?” Will says all at once. “Can I just go? I need to go jump out a window.”

“If you wish to retire to your room, I think that is more than fair.” Hannibal grants. “Though, of course, I will be retrieving you for dinner.”

“Fantastic.” Will says with a faux-brightness. “By the way, do the windows in my room open?”

“There is no need for such dramatics, Will.” Hannibal says. “And of course not.”

“Out of curiosity, where do you keep your hammer?”

Hannibal rises.

“Enough. Go take care of matters in your bedroom, I will prepare dinner.”

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Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is nice and long at 12k words. I hope you guys enjoy it. I hope I can keep up this semi-regular updating, but it is pretty out of character for me lol
>
> I've been really appreciating all the comments, kudos, and bookmarks. I don't respond to every comment because I am stupid and don't know what to say a lot of the time, but I read every single one and am so happy people are liking this story. I've been enjoying writing it, too!
>
> I hope you guys like this update. I am *really* excited about the next chapter.

Will flops down on his bed and unzips his pants. His small cock is still hard, but what he hadn't noticed before were the thin trails of slick running down the back of his thighs. He grunts and lifts his hips off the bed as he pushes the pants down his legs.

He starts stroking his cock, half-heartedly, trying to think of anything but the alpha downstairs. Quickly, he grows frustrated and flops over onto his stomach.He squeezes his eyes shut as the memory floods back into his mind: the alpha's hand firm on his back, his lips brushing the swollen, leaking gland on Will's neck. A gush of slick spills out of his hole.

Will twists back onto his back, and experimentally dips a finger towards his wet hole. He moans as the digit breaches his entrance, a bead of precum spilling onto the head of his cock. He arches his back for easier access, and tries to let his mind wander into something provocative enough to finish the job.

All he can think is the alpha, no matter how hard he tries to conjure something else. Any time he tries to veer his imagination off its desired path, it ends up working its way back around to Hannibal: his dark eyes, his strong arms, the way it feels to sit at his feet. He recalls the events of the previous night: the alpha pinning him effortlessly, being made to crawl to the alpha's feet.

Without meaning to, he pictures the alpha bending him the arm of the plush chair in the foyer, shoving his knee between the omega's thighs and fucking him until his voice gives out from screaming. Will cries out as a rope of cum shoots out his cock, spraying across the front of his fine, paisley shirt, and he lays in awe of his orgasm, by far the most intense he's ever had, as his chest rises and falls rapidly.

He lies there for a moment, his mind distantly mulling over a plan to provoke the alpha into spanking him again, when a knock on his door makes him jolt upright.

"*Don't come in!* " Will shouts, his hands moving to maintain his dignity. He is relieved when the door doesn't open.

"Dinner will be ready in 15 minutes, Will." comes Hannibal's voice, edged with amusement. "I suggest you wrap things up."

Will rises reluctantly, unbuttoning his ruined shirt. He pulls open the drawer of his dresser to find a row of folded shirts in a similar style. He selects a black button up, its paisley pattern printed in a dark blue, and a pair of khaki pants.

He dresses quickly, then stops in the bathroom where he washes his hands and examines himself in the mirror. His face is a guilty shade of red, and he is sweatier than he would like to be. He grabs a rag from the cabinet below the sink and washes his face with the cleanser Hannibal left for him on the counter. He rinses his face and runs a comb through his hair, then reassesses his reflection.

He winces, still feeling like he looks a bit too guilty, but doesn't think he could fix the situation in fifteen minutes. Besides, he reasons, it's not like the alpha didn't know *exactly* what he was doing up here. Though, he hopes, Hannibal doesn't know he was doing it to the thought of *him.*

He descends the stairs quickly, and finds the alpha placing their plates on the dining room table as he enters.

"I prepared something simple tonight, perhaps uncharacteristically so." Hannibal says without looking up. "A pot roast sandwich on homemade sourdough, prepared earlier today; a side of french fries fried in duck fat; and a small serving of mixed fruit."

The alpha meets the omega's gaze as he takes his seat.

"Come here, Will, kneel beside me."

Will swallows, and pads across the floor to the alpha's side. He falters for only a moment before dropping to his knees at the alpha's side, looking up at him wide-eyed. Part of him feels sure the alpha was somehow privy to his fantasies, and that if he wasn't he can read it on his face. The alpha, however, seems unconcerned as he tucks his napkin into his lap.

"I must confess there is an ulterior motive to tonight's menu." Hannibal says, cutting a small square off of Will's sandwich. "If you are not opposed, I was hoping to feed you by hand tonight."

Will fidgets in his spot.

"I think I'm too hungry to decline."

“Yes.” Hannibal says, he picks up the slice of sandwich and lowers it to the omega. “I had a feeling you would be after such a meager lunch.”

Will takes the bit of sandwich in his mouth, trying to keep his lips from touching the alpha’s hand. He pulls away as Hannibal swipes his thumb across the omega’s bottom lip, catching a spill of juice. Hannibal maintains eye contact as he raises the thumb to his own lips, sucking the juice from it. Will’s face burns as he shifts his gaze to the floor.

“Have you ever been told how pretty you are, Will?” Hannibal asks, cutting another piece from the sandwich. “The sight of you kneeling at my feet is something to behold. Your eyes, especially, are very beautiful, such a lovely shade of blue.”

Will squirms in his spot. “That’s not the kind of thing people say often to betas.”

“It’s not especially unusual for alphas to pursue betas.” Hannibal counters, lowering another bite to the omega. “I can’t imagine I am the first to notice you, Will. Eat.”

Will turns his face to meet the food being offered to him. He chews it thoughtfully.

“There was someone.” He yields. “When I was a cop, an alpha on the force took a particular interest in me. He was always offering to accompany me on assignments, and he bought me a coffee every morning. Honestly, I didn’t really notice until the rest of the department started to get involved. I thought he was just being nice.”

“I’d wager there was more than one, then.” Hannibal offers, lowering another bite to the omega. “I imagine it would take a lot for you to consider yourself desirable, you probably dismissed many alpha’s pursuits as superficial niceties.”

Will takes the food offered to him, swallowing dryly.

“There was this guy in high school, too.” Will says after a moment. “He would steal my clothes every day after gym, and then keep saying ‘just come over here and get them.’ Then he’d keep taking a step back, trying to get me to come out in the hall for them. I was late to Spanish every day for months.”

Hannibal’s expression is unreadable as he watches the omega. Will turns his gaze away as he continues.

“He finally got caught by the coach, and the principal suspended him for bullying.” Will says quietly. “But my dad was really weird when he found out. He kept asking questions, like ‘did you say anything to him?’ ‘Were you trying to get his attention?’ It was like he thought it was my fault.”

“He may have.” Hannibal affirms. “It was your father who provided you with the suppressants, yes?”

Will nods.

“It is a wonder why an alpha would choose to sabotage their child that way,” Hannibal says. “Instead of protecting them.”

Will straightens his back defiantly, glaring up at the alpha.

“He *was* protecting me.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow.

“Care to explain?”

Will swallows.

“My mom was an omega.” Will says flatly. “And she died, giving birth to me. Dad said the doctors completely ignored her, they kept saying she was exaggerating, that she just had a low pain tolerance because she was an omega. Then the tears in her cervix turned septic, and she died after three agonizing days. My dad made sure I would be safe because he made sure I could keep *myself* safe.”

“I’m sure you think that’s true.” Hannibal allows. “But at the cost of your body? Your physical health was deteriorating, Will, and your mental health was all but destroyed. Your father should have taught you how and when to reach out for help.”

Will glares at the alpha.

“I’m not interested in what you think my father should have done.” He spits. “He was twice the alpha you are.”

Hannibal adjusts in his chair, so that he is facing the omega head on.

“I hope you are prepared for another punishment if you intend to keep speaking to me this way, Will.”

Will growls, not backing down.

“My father wasn’t so intimidated by the thought of simply allowing an omega to *speak.* ”

Hannibal snorts.

“You think I punish you because I’m intimidated by you, Will?”

His amusement only ignites Will’s rage further.

“I think you and every other alpha is scared of what would happen if omegas weren’t at your complete disposal.” Will argues.

“The only thing I could imagine us fearing is the fate that would befall our beloved omegas.” Hannibal answers easily.

Will rolls his eyes.

“It doesn’t feel very *beloved* to be deprived of my autonomy.”

“Come now, Will.” Hannibal scoffs. “Surely you recognize that I have provided you with as much autonomy as I safely can. And I intend to allow more, if you show me you are worthy of the privilege.”

“I shouldn’t have to prove myself *worthy* to go in my own backyard.” Will spits.

“Is that what this is about?” Hannibal asks. “I would’ve been happy to allow you outside if you had asked.”

“That’s not the point!” Will nearly shouts. “I shouldn’t have to crawl around at your feet and *beg* you for the ‘honor’ of being treated like a human being!”

“If I were you, I wouldn’t raise your voice at me like that.” Hannibal says calmly, his eyes narrowed. “I know it is difficult for you to understand, but everything I have done for you since meeting you has been for your own benefit.”

“Bullshit!” Will spits, rising all at once from his spot on the floor. Hannibal rises with him, so that the two are staring each other down.

“Everything you’ve done for me has been to secure my place under your thumb!” Will continues. The alpha glowers down at him, a head taller than the omega, but Will doesn’t back down. “You don’t give a shit about what I actually want, or what’s best for me. You just want to make sure your pretty little fuck toy is as easy to play with as possible! Isn’t that right, *Dr. Lecter?* ”

When Will finishes, the room is silent. He can hear the rain beat against the windows behind them. Hannibal glares down at him, chest rising and falling with even, controlled breaths. In the quiet of the room, Will can feel the alpha’s rage, seeming to radiate off of him with every breath. He can’t help but shrink away, taking a stumbling step backward.

“Oh?” Hannibal says with faux-surprise after an uncomfortable moment of quiet. “Are you done yelling already? By all means, don’t stop on my account.”

Will swallows, looking at the floor next to him.

“I didn’t say anything that wasn’t true.” He mutters bitterly, and Hannibal takes a step forward.

“You have proved yourself to be *very* ungrateful, Will.” Hannibal says dangerously. “I have been nothing but kind with you since you arrived at my estate, but now I see that I have been *far* too lenient. I’m sure you know what comes next.”

Will falters for a beat, then tears from the dining room in a sprint. Hannibal gives chase.

The omega makes it halfway up the stairs before he is seized by the alpha around the waist. The alpha pins him painfully against the stairs, straddling his legs as Will lies on his stomach.

“Let me go!” Will shouts, Thrashing beneath the alpha. The excitement he had felt in his room at the thought of a punishment has completely disappeared, and all Will can feel is icy fear running through his veins. He starts kicking wildly as the alpha pulls at the waistband of his pants, exposing his bare ass.

“If you are inclined to *act* like a child, Will, I will be inclined to treat you like one.” Hannibal growls. “After this I ought to wash your mouth out with soap for your choice of words downstairs.”

Will’s thrashing freezes as he hears the alpha unbuckling his belt, and panic runs through him. He knows rape is not an uncommon punishment for omegas. Legally, it isn’t even considered rape if it is performed by an alpha in custody of an omega. His heart hammers in his chest and he begins thrashing again beneath the alpha, harder than before.

“Don’t!” Will shouts. “Don’t touch me! Let me go!”

“You will only make things harder for yourself by struggling.” the alpha warns.

Hannibal grips the back of Will’s neck, digging his thumb and forefinger into the omega’s scent glands. Instinctively, Will freezes, and that is when the true horror begins. Tears roll down Will’s cheeks and his heart hammers in his chest. He opens his mouth to plead with the alpha, but all that comes out is sobs. All he can do is tremble beneath the alpha, and wait for it to be over.

“How many do you think you deserve?” Hannibal growls into Will’s ear, and Will startles, confused.

“What?” He asks, shaken. The alpha pulls his hand from the omega’s neck.

“How many,” The alpha says slowly, snapping his belt in his hands, “do you think you deserve?”

Will almost laughs in relief. The alpha isn’t going to rape him, only whip him with his belt.

“I don’t know.” He says breathily. “Maybe 20?”

“I think 25 or 30 would be more suited to your behavior.”

Will almost shrugs, unbothered by another spanking after the horror he thought he was going to endure.

“30, then. Just do it.”

And the alpha does it.

The belt stings as it whips across Will’s ass, and he is sure it will sting tomorrow as well. The alpha’s leather belt raises angry, red welts on the omega’s ass and thighs, but Will takes it without complaint. His relief boils into silent defiance as the belt lands against his skin again and again, and the omega bites his cheek to keep from crying out. He glares at the stair in front of him as he waits for it to be over.

When the alpha is done, he stands, freeing the omega.

“Stand up, Will.” He orders. “Face me.”

Will obeys without a word, glaring down at the alpha’s feet. He flinches as the alpha swipes his thumb across the omega’s cheek, wiping away the tear perched there.

“You took that well.” Hannibal says slowly, sounding pleasantly surprised. “You fought so hard at first, then you simply submitted yourself to your punishment. I am proud of you.”

Will says nothing, gaze cast down. He holds the waistband of his pants at mid thigh to preserve as much of his dignity as possible, but knows better than to pull his pants up without permission.

“Will.” Hannibal says softly. The omega continues looking pointedly at the ground.

“You thought I was going to do something else,” Hannibal asks, “Didn’t you?”

Will swallows.

“I heard you unbuckle your belt.” Will mutters, by way of explanation.

“I would never punish you like that, Will.” The alpha says softly.

“It would be your legal right if you wanted to.” Will spits, and the alpha flinches.

Hannibal says nothing for a long while, examining the omega with narrow eyes. When he does speak his tone is even, and unreadable.

“I think you ought to retire to your room for the night, Will.” He says finally. “I will come for you in the morning.”

*

As promised, Hannibal retrieves Will from his room at 7 AM sharp. The omega sits up when he hears the door open, not wanting the alpha’s hands on him. He’s hardly slept at all, between his growling stomach and the incessant nightmares, but that has never stopped him from going to work before. So, he stands and walks past the alpha out the door without a word.

“Jack will be here for you at 9 o’ clock.” Hannibal tells Will as the pair descend the stairs. “He tells me this one is quite gruesome.”

Will grunts, but says nothing.

“I’ve made breakfast, Will.” Hannibal says gently. “I’m sure you’re hungry.”

Will still doesn’t respond as the pair enter the kitchen. Hannibal moves to the island, turning off the stove, which he has left on low. He pulls a large pan from the front burner and divides the contents among two plates, which sit waiting on the counter.

“Another egg scramble.” Hannibal says as he takes a plate in each hand, moving toward the dining room. “Much like the first breakfast we shared. The protein will fill your stomach for the day ahead.”

Will still does not speak, following the alpha to his place in the dining room. He kneels without being asked, and without saying a word. He winces as his ass makes contact with the heels of his feet, skin still raw and angry from the night before. There is a beat of silence before Hannibal speaks.

“I would like to apologize, Will.” He says. “For what I said about your father last night. I don’t think it was fair to expect you to remain pleasant after I spoke ill of your family. I hope you’ll forgive my lapse in manners.”

“How kind for you to deign to apologize *after* whipping me with your belt, Alpha!” Will spits, a bitter faux-brightness in his voice. “I must be really lucky to have found myself under the rule of someone so *altruistic* .”

The alpha inhales sharply, eyes narrowed.

“I am growing quite tired of your attitude, Will.” Hannibal says evenly. “I’m sure you know I am not the only one with things to apologize for after last night.”

“Yeah, I think you’re gonna have to pick one.” Will replies, impudent. “You can either whip my ass or have me apologize. Both is a bit of an overkill, don’t you think?”

“I don’t think it is an overkill at all,” Hannibal answers easily. “To expect you to take responsibility for your actions even after their consequences.”

Will says nothing, pointing his face away from the alpha, and Hannibal sighs. He lowers a forkful of egg down to the omega.

“Here, Will.” He says. “Eat. I don’t want you to be hungry while you work today.”

“I don’t want it.” Will says flatly.

“I’m afraid I’m not giving you a choice, this time.” Hannibal responds coldly. “I will not have you walk away from a third meal in a row. As your alpha, it is my job to see to it that you are appropriately nourished.”

“And what’ll you do about it if I don’t?” Will challenges. “Hold me down and stuff a fork in my face?”

“If given no other option, I would make use of a feeding tube.” Hannibal responds easily, lifting the fork back up and dropping it on the plate. “But I would hate to start your day with such a negative experience, Will.”

Will narrows his eyes at the alpha.

“You wouldn’t.”

“Would you like to find out?” Hannibal asks, meeting Will’s challenge. His eyebrows are raised, expression neutral, almost bored. Will doesn’t doubt that he would.

The alpha sighs, scooping another portion of egg onto the fork. He turns and lowers it to the omega.

“I will give you until the count of three, as before.”

Will swallows, and fidgets in his spot. He feels the same inertia overtake him as he did the night he arrived; the panic that kept him rooted in his chair.

“One.” the alpha says slowly. The fork hangs in front of Will’s lips. He turns away, mouth watering at the smell. His thoughts are racing, trying to find a way out of the situation. He doesn’t want to yield, to lose yet another standoff with the alpha, but he also doesn’t want a feeding tube forced down his throat.

Hannibal grabs the omega’s chin, turning his head so that he has to look at him. The fork hovers a few centimeters from Will’s lips, but the alpha does not push it forward.

“*Two.”*

Will fidgets, pulling his face backward from the alpha’s grasp, but not turning away. He turns his gaze to Hannibal’s face, eyes pleading.

“Three.” Hannibal says, and Will’s eyes widen. His face rushes forward, and he takes the fork into his mouth all at once. Then, he pulls away, chewing the food slowly.

“Good boy, Will.” Hannibal coos. “I knew you’d make the right choice.”

Will swallows, saying nothing. The food is delicious, as always, and his stomach aches from having eaten so little the day before, but it stings to have lost another battle to the alpha. He winces as he tries to calculate their scores over the past two days, Will knows he is losing.

The rest of the meal is quiet, nearly silent, but the omega swallows all of his breakfast in the end. Afterward, Hannibal leaves Will alone to dress for work, heading to his own room to prepare for his own return to work.

Will takes his time dressing, combing through his clothes to try to find the least feminine combination possible. He ends up pulling on the black shirt and khakis from the night before, only slightly wrinkled and barely soiled from being worn for less than an hour. When he is done, he checks his reflection in the mirror, then turns to the leather box on his dresser.

He knows Hannibal won’t leave without seeing it on him. And he is sure Jack won’t let him leave the house without wearing it if he tries to. If he wants to evade the trinket, he will have to be more patient than that.

He pulls the collar around his throat and fastens it. Then, he eyes himself in the mirror, dissatisfied. He tries tucking the collar within the collar of his shirt, but the tag makes an

obvious impression beneath the fabric. He tries pulling his shirt collar up, but it is obvious he is trying to hide something when he does. He startles when he hears the alpha call his name.

The omega folds his collar back down and hurries down the stairs, meeting the alpha in the foyer. Hannibal frowns when he sees him.

“You have plenty of clean clothes.” Hannibal says. “You wore those last night.”

“I barely wore them.” Will argues. “They’re still clean.”

“They are wrinkled.”

“Barely.” Will says, tugging at the hem of his shirt.

Hannibal shakes his head.

“No, Will.” He says firmly. “Now that you are in my custody, you are a reflection of myself. I will not have you going out in dirty clothes.”

The alpha grabs the omega by the shoulders and marches him up the stairs. When they reach Will’s room, Hannibal pulls open Will’s dresser and hands him a pair of clothes. Will winces

The alpha has selected a lavender shirt with a paisley pattern in a darker purple. With it, he hands Will a pair of black pants in the same style as his others.

“Hurry and get changed.” The alpha instructs. “I still need to scent you before I leave for work.”

Will groans, shifting from foot to foot.

“If you make me late, Will, you will wish you hadn’t when I return home tonight.”

With a sigh, Will heads into the bathroom and makes quick work changing clothes. When he exits the bathroom, the alpha is no longer in his room, but he hears him call his name from the foyer.

“Much better.” Hannibal says as Will enters the room. “Very handsome. Come here.”

When Will approaches, the alpha makes quick work of rolling his sleeves to his elbows as he had the night before. He grips Will’s arms in front of the elbows and begins to scent him. Will furrows his brow as the tingling sensation begins again.

Will pulls his arms away as soon as the alpha allows him, and begins pulling his sleeves back down. Hannibal pays him no mind, turning to retrieve something from the coat rack near the door.

“Here.” He says, holding the item out for the omega. “I get the impression you would prefer to wear something familiar. This should be just as you left it.”

The alpha holds out the omega's jacket, the only item of clothing remaining from Will's past life. Will takes it readily and pulls it on. Its leather collar smells of woods and dogs; of home.

"Where did you get this?" Will asks.

"It was with your things in the hospital." Hannibal explains. He steps forward and zips the garment for the omega, leaving just a bit of zipper at the top. "It is cold enough for it today"

Hannibal steps away and examines the omega. Then, he reaches into his pocket.

"And here." He says, extending the device to Will. "Your cell phone."

Will takes the phone, flipping it open.

"I didn't think I would see this again." He mutters.

"It would be counterproductive to keep it from you." The alpha responds. "If you are going to work, I will need you to have a way to contact me if something goes wrong."

There is a beat of silence. Hannibal checks his watch.

"I need to leave before I am late." the alpha says. "You will likely be home before me. Please behave yourself today."

And with that, the alpha is gone. Will examines his jacket as the alpha closes the door behind him.

Will realizes with a rush of excitement that when the jacket is fully zipped, it hides the collar easily. He quickly pulls the zipper back down to where Hannibal had left it, knowing better than to play such a valuable card so soon, but he makes a note to remember this later.

An hour later, Jack pulls up in one of the FBI's black jeeps and honks once. Will eagerly walks out the front door, climbing into the passenger seat.

"I wanted to talk to you about the shrike." Jack says as Will pulls the door shut.

"The shrike is dead." Will says. "What about the shrike?"

"We investigated his cabin last week." Jack responds, dropping a manilla folder full of photographs onto Will's lap. "Anything we can learn will help us catch the next one like him. There are still 7 bodies unaccounted for."

"Well, he *was* eating them."

"There had to be some parts he wasn't eating."

"Not necessarily."

Will opens the folder and examines the photographs within. The cabin is lined with antlers, dozens and dozens of them. One photo shows the body of a deer left on a carving table, still waiting to be skinned. Will studies them.

“We think he might not have been eating them *alone* .” Jack says after a moment. “Maybe someone was helping him.”

“Such as?” Will asks.

“Such as someone in a coma.”

“Abigail?” Will asks.

Jack grunts.

“That’s not right.” Will says. “Hobbs killed alone.”

Jack sighs.

“We’ve been conducting house to house interviews.” Jack says, by way of explanation. “Abigail and her father spent a lot of time together.”

He taps the photos on Will’s lap.

“They spent a lot of time together *here.* ”

“That doesn’t mean she helped him.” Will argues.

“She would’ve been the perfect bait.”

Will is quiet for a moment, flipping through the contents of the folder. He gets to the last two pages, a print off of an internet article. Photos of the shrike’s cabin are plastered between the paragraphs.

“What’s this?” Will asks. “‘*Inside the Shrike’s Nest*’?”

“*That*.” Jack says sharply. “Is courtesy of Freddie Lounds. Are you familiar?”

Will shakes his head.

“She’s been a pain in our ass for a long time.” Jack explains. “She runs a true crime website, *Tattle Crime*. She got into the shrike’s cabin while we weren’t there and got pictures, then she wrote that lovely little piece.”

“How’d she get in?” Will asks.

“Picked the lock, we think.” Jack says. “She’s done it before. She’ll do anything to get her hands on a story.”

“What’s the case you’re picking me up for today?” Will asks.

“Do you know anything about gardening, Will?”

Jack pulls the car off the road, putting it into park, and the pair get out. Jack leads the omega into the forest ahead.

“9 victims,” Jack says as he and Will approach the crime scene. “Found in shallow graves. 5 alphas, 4 omegas. They were buried alive, found covered in fungus. Local police found some tire tracks on a service road. Some small animal traps in the surrounding area.”

Jack and Will are at the police tape now, and Jack ducks beneath it.

“He wanted to keep his crop undisturbed.” Will says, following suit.

“All that’s missing is the scarecrow.” Jack agrees.

“9 bodies,” Jimmy says as the pair approach. “All in various stages of decay, and, as you can see, all very well fertilized.

“He buried them in a high-nutrient compost.” Beverly chimes in. “He was enthusiastically encouraging decomposition.”

“They were buried alive with the intention of keeping them that way.” Zeller says next. “I mean, for a little while.”

“Long enough for the fungus to eat away any distinguishing characteristics.” Jimmy agrees.

“Line and rebar were used to administer intravenous fluids after they were buried.” Zeller continues, gesturing to the set up, which runs up a nearby tree. “He was feeding them something.”

“No restraints?” Will asks.

“Just dirt.” Jimmy says.

“The other end of the air-supply system comes up over there.” Beverly says, pointing to the other side of the killer’s garden. “It isn’t a very considerate clean air solution, which clearly wasn’t a priority, ’cause he isn’t lazy.”

“No, he’s not.” Will agrees.

Will studies the scene, eyes examining the nine, decaying bodies. Hannibal was right, it certainly is gruesome. Jack claps a hand on his shoulder.

“Welcome back, Will.” He says, then he and the rest of the team make their way to the outskirts of the scene, leaving Will alone.

Will steps forward, putting more distance between himself and the rest of the team. He can feel eyes on him, staring, and is suddenly very aware of the collar around his throat. He zips

his jacket, pulling its collar up to hide the trinket. Then, he closes his eyes. The pendulum swings in front of his face.

Will can see the crime play out in front of him. He stands over the latest victim, shovel in hand, and covers him with black soil. There is no need to bind his arms and legs. He is alive, but he will never be conscious again.

He won't know that he's dying. Will thinks. *And I don't need him to. This is my design.*

Will is kneeling next to the body. He peers down at it, and the dead eyes of Garrett Jacob Hobbs peer back. Will suppresses a shudder. Then, the body reaches out and grabs Will by the arm. Will stumbles backward.

"Don't touch him!" Zeller cries, rushing to the body- no longer a corpse but a zombie.

Will stands up, and dusts himself off. He makes his way hurriedly back to the safety of the trees. Jack follows.

"Will." He's says, voice quiet, but tone firm. "It was my understanding that you were supposed to be wearing a collar."

Will exhales a shuddering breath, still shaken, and tugs the collar of his jacket away from his throat to show the blue leather.

"I'm wearing it." He says. "It's cold out."

Jack raises a brow.

"It's not that cold out." He says flatly. "The collar needs to be visible at all times, Will."

"All my alpha said is that I need to wear it, Jack." Will counters. "He said nothing about it being visible."

"You may choose to play these kinds of games with your own alpha, Will." Jack says. "But I'm not as patient as Dr. Lecter. I gave him my word that I would look after you while you were at work, so if he says you need to be wearing a collar, then you need to be wearing a collar. And it needs to be visible."

Will huffs, defeated, and folds the collar of his jacket back down, and Jack leads him back to the jeep

*

In the forensic labs of the FBI, the fluorescent lights glare ruthlessly down at the fungus-covered bodies. Will tugs absentmindedly at the collar around his neck.

"What were they soaked in?" He asks, to no one in particular. Jimmy answers.

"A highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop. Perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi."

“It wasn’t the mushrooms, though.” Zeller adds quickly. “They all died of kidney failure”

“Dextrose in all the catheters.” Beverly says, not looking up from the body in front of her. “He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after their circulatory systems broke down.”

Will squints. “Why would he force-feed them sugar water?”

“You know who loves sugar water?” Jimmy says, by way of response. “Mushrooms. They crave it.”

“Recovering alcoholics, too. They crave sugar. ” Zeller chimes in. Then, with a wink, he adds. “Uh, don’t take that personally, buddy.”

“Oh, I’m not recovering.” Jimmy quips easily.

“You feed sugar to the fungus in your body,” Zeller continues, “and the fungus creates alcohol. So it’s like friends helping friends, really.”

“It’s not just alcoholics who have compromised endocrine systems.” Will points out. “They all died of kidney failure? Could be death by diabetic ketoacidosis.”

Beverly squints. “Did you know they were diabetics?”

“We don’t know they were diabetics.” Zeller responds.

“No,” Will says easily. “They’re all diabetics. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground.”

“How would he induce diabetic comas?” Beverly asks.

“He changes their medication.” Will responds. “So he’s a doctor or a pharmacist or he works somewhere in medical services.”

“So, he buries them,” Beverly says slowly, “then feeds them sugar to keep them alive long enough for the circulatory systems to soak it up.”

“So he can feed the mushrooms!” Jimmy finishes for her.

“So we dug up his mushroom garden?” Zeller asks.

“Yeah,” Will says, “and he’s gonna want to grow a new one.”

The lab is quiet for a moment. Then, Beverly speaks.

“What gets me is that they were all alphas and omegas.” She says. “It’s like he was burying them in pairs.”

“That’s how they were set up.” Zeller agrees. “Alpha, omega, alpha, omega, alpha, omega, alpha, omega, alpha.”

“They *were* pairs.” Will confirms. “He was lining them up in order, like dolls on a shelf.”

“Then that begs the question.” says Jack. “Is he an alpha or an omega himself?”

Will shakes his head.

“He’s a beta.”

“How can you tell?” Zeller asks. “Gruesome murder seems pretty ‘alpha’ to me.”

“The lack of passion isn’t ‘alpha’ to me.” Will says. “He- he admires the bond alphas and omegas share, in a way he only can because he will never experience it himself. He was fulfilling his role as a beta, making sure everyone was taken care of, making sure everything was divided evenly.”

“So he’ll be looking for an omega, then.” Jack points out.

“If he hasn’t already found one.” Will responds.

The room is quiet. Then, Jack speaks up..

“So we gather data on the victims,” He says, “where they get their insulin, where they were last seen. Then we cross reference that with pharmacists.”

“The victims disappeared from all over the county.” Beverly responds. “Or at least, the ones we’ve identified.”

“Maybe he’s a floater?” Will suggests. “That would narrow it down.”

“So we’ll get a list of pharmacists from all the pharmacies in the county.” Jack says. “We could catch him by the end of the night.”

“I thought he might be a doctor?” Beverly says.

“Not a doctor.” Jimmy says flatly. “If a doctor was prescribing bad meds, the pharmacist would catch it. The pharmacist has the last hands on these prescriptions.”

“So, he’s a pharmacist.” Will says. “He’s the one handing off these prescriptions.”

“We just have to see who was working when these people disappeared.” Beverly points out.

“I want those lists by noon, agent Katz.” Jack says. “Will, come with me.”

Will follows Jack into the hall.

“Great work today.” Jack says softly. “Let’s get you home.”

Will blinks.

“Home? It’s not even noon.”

“Your alpha asked me to get you home as quickly as possible.” Jack explains. “He said you’re still having a lot of trouble adjusting, he didn’t want you to overwork yourself.”

“Yesterday he said I didn’t have to be home until 5!”

“Don’t shoot the messenger, Will.” Jack retorts. “I’m just glad he’s letting you work at all.”

*

Jack drops Will off in front of Hannibal’s manor before noon.

“Dr. Lecter said that he wants you to call him when you get in, Will.” Jack tells him. “I’ll make sure he knows I told you.”

Will grunts as he unbuckles his seatbelt. Jack hasn’t said it, but the threat is implied.

Will walks into the house and removes his collar immediately. He wants to drop it on the floor, but worries what will happen if he forgets to pick it up before the alpha arrives home from work, so he slips it in his pocket.

He makes his way to the living room, taking a seat on the couch, and pulls his phone from his pocket. He dials the number to Hannibal’s office, and the alpha answers on the first ring.

“Will.” Hannibal says warmly. “I trust you’ve arrived home safely.”

“I have.” Will says dryly. “Is that all?”

“Patience, Will.” Hannibal responds. “How was work?”

“Gruesome.” Will says with a breathy, nervous laugh. “Like you said it would be.”

Hannibal is quiet for a moment.

“Yes.” He says softly. “Jack told me. Human fertilizer. Food for mushrooms.”

“They were still *alive*.” Will whispers.

“You know, Will.” Hannibal says. “The structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain, an intricate web of connections.”

“They were buried in pairs.” Will responds hoarsely, neither a confirmation nor a rebuttal of the alpha’s comment. “Alpha, omega, alpha, omega, alpha.”

“Now they are knitted together forever.” Hannibal says. “Their nervous systems are woven into one giant web.”

“Well, not forever.” Will points out. “‘Cause we dug them up.”

The alpha laughs, and then the line is quiet for a moment.

“I left lunch for you.” Hannibal says. “In the fridge. Please eat it.”

“On the floor?” Will asks, and then wishes that he hadn’t.

“No.” Hannibal responds, to Will’s relief. “When I am at work, you may eat at the table.”

Will hears a noise in the background of Hannibal’s office: A door opening and shutting, a woman’s eager hello.

“I have to go, Will,” Hannibal says, “I have a patient arriving.”

“When I was a patient, you took lunch at noon.” Will points out

“Unfortunately, this was the only time she could make.” Hannibal responds. “Scheduling issues. I have to go. Behave for me, Will.”

And the line goes dead with a click. Will makes his way to the kitchen.

On the middle shelf of the fridge, Hannibal has left a healthy portion of pasta in a glass tupperware. Taped to its lid are instructions to reheat it in the oven, but Will discards them and places the dish in the microwave.

When the food is hot, Will makes his way to the dining room, taking a seat at the head of the table. He scoots his chair in, and takes his fork in hand, but stops short. It feels wrong, for some reason, to eat in the alpha’s chair. Will stands and moves his lunch one seat to the right.

When he finally takes a bite, Will moans at the taste. The pasta is rich and creamy, with cuts of a wonderfully grilled meat throughout, which Will thinks is chicken. It tastes better than any chicken he’s had before. He finishes the meal in a matter of minutes and has to stop himself from licking the bowl.

When lunch is done, Will drops his dishes in the sink and makes use of his key to the front door, taking a walk around Hannibal’s property. The estate is large, an iron fence encircling it, with an ornate gate sprawling across the drive. The grounds are immaculately kept, too, not a single leaf disturbing the browning grass as Baltimore enters winter. He wonders where Hannibal plans on housing his dogs, having more than enough room for them.

Will approaches the gate, Jack having locked it behind himself when he left. It is made of vertical iron bars, about 10 feet high. Will notes that it seems difficult, but not impossible, to climb.

The temptation to run sits at the back of his mind, of course, as it has since he’d arrived. He knows, however, that any freedom he gained would be short-lived. The alpha is in custody of him, if he went missing he could have the local police on his trail in minutes and have the omega back in hours, kneeling by his side in time for dinner. Still, pulling at the iron bars, and looking past them down the alpha’s long, private drive, scratches an itch deep within Will, and he savors his time doing so.

The alpha returns as the sun is setting, and Will hears his car from the living room. He sits on the couch reading a book, plucked at random off the alpha's shelves. The alpha calls for Will as he enters the foyer, and Will reluctantly rises to meet him.

The alpha pulls the omega into an embrace as he approaches, a gesture Will finds decidedly overfamiliar, and ignores the way the omega fights to pull away.

"I missed you." Hannibal says warmly, as he steps away, hands perched on Will's shoulders. "How was your day?"

Will shrugs. "Uneventful. I took a walk after work. Lunch was good."

"You wore your collar today, yes?" Hannibal asks.

"Until I got home." Will responds with a roll of his eyes. "Like you said."

Hannibal takes a step backward, examining the omega with pensive eyes. Will swallows.

"It's interesting to hear you say that." Hannibal says, pulling his tablet out of his bag. He taps the screen quickly, then pulls outward with his thumb and forefinger. Then, he turns the screen to Will.

"Tell me, Will, what is wrong with this picture?"

The front page of *Tattle Crime* is displayed on the screen. Hannibal has zoomed in on a picture of Will, eyes closed as he reconstructs the crime scene in his mind. His jacket is zipped up, collar unfolded to hide the blue leather around his neck. Will's eyes widen.

"It was on." he says quickly. "It was under the jacket."

"Fascinating!" Hannibal says brightly. "Will, could you please explain to me what the point of a collar is if no one can see it?"

Will fidgets.

"It was like that for 5 minutes." He says. "10 at the most. Jack had me fix it when he saw."

"And I suppose we're going to leave it up to Jack," Hannibal says dryly. "To decide whether or not you're going to behave?"

Will is silent. He looks at the floor.

"You are in trouble, Will." Hannibal informs.

"I didn't know you were an avid reader of true crime tabloids." Will snarks, hoping to change the subject.

"I may not have been." Hannibal responds with a sigh. "If the author hadn't shown up to my office today."

Will's eyebrows raise. "She came to your work? To interview you?"

"She came under the guise of therapy."

"So much for doctor-patient confidentiality." Will snarks. Hannibal narrows his eyes.

"She is not a patient."

"And I guess she asked about me?" Will asks quickly. "I hope you didn't tell her anything."

"She did not ask about you by name." Hannibal responds. "Instead, she asked a lot of questions about omegas. She heard me on the phone with you, and tried to use it as a gateway into information about our relationship. I saw through it pretty quickly."

"That's a relief." Will says. "Although I doubt it'll stop her. Jack said she's picked locks to get into crime scenes before."

"I'm sure Ms. Lounds will be a thorn in your side for the foreseeable future." Hannibal affirms. "But that is enough talk about her. We must tend to the matter of your punishment."

Will winces.

"I was hoping you'd forget about that."

"I'm sure you were." Hannibal agrees dryly. "I suppose when you brought up Ms. Lounds, you were hoping to distract me long enough to evade the consequences of your actions. Is that right?"

Will says nothing, eyes cast down to the floor. Hannibal sighs.

"Truthfully, I am unsure what to do with you." the alpha admits. "You want freedom, and I want to afford it to you, but when I do, you use it to worm your way out from the few rules I have put in place. I am starting to think it is a mistake to afford you freedom at all."

Will looks up, eyes wide.

"You're not going to make me quit, are you?"

"Perhaps I should." Hannibal replies. "But I think we owe Jack more than that. What I am wondering, however, is if it is wise to allow you access to your things, if this is how you are going to use them."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean, Will," Hannibal sighs, "Is that, while I would hate to have to get rid of your jacket, seeing that it is one of the few items you've retained from your life before, I am not certain you have earned the privilege to choose your own clothes."

An unexpected pang of panic stabs Will in the gut. He shakes his head.

“Please don’t.” He says. “It- it’s the only thing that smells like me here. It’s the only thing that looks like something I’d wear.”

“But if you are going to use it to hide your collar,” Hannibal counters, “Surely it’d be wise to get rid of the temptation.”

“Please don’t, alpha.” Will says, voice small. “I won’t do it again.”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, examining the omega. Will can tell he is taken aback by the use of his title.

“Is there something you would have me do instead?” Hannibal asks slowly. Will swallows.

“Just spank me again.” He says. “Please, alpha. Don’t take my jacket. It’s the last thing I have.”

Hannibal exhales.

“Come here, Will.”

Will steps forward, eyes fixed on the floor. Hannibal lifts his chin gently with one hand, so that he’s forced to look him in the eye.

“I could be convinced, Will.” Hannibal says softly. “Since you have addressed me properly. But I want you on your best behavior during this punishment; no kicking, no thrashing, no backtalk. If you impress me, I will give you another chance.

With that Hannibal drops Will’s chin, taking a seat in the armchair next to him. He pats his lap.

“Drop your trousers and get over my knee, Will.” Hannibal says. “Quickly.”

Will unzips his pants and pushes them down thighs. He approaches the alpha, but Hannibal holds up a hand.

“Boxers, too.”

Will suppresses a groan. He pushes his boxers down, then lowers himself across the alpha’s lap. Hannibal grips the omega’s hips, adjusting him so that his bare ass is on full display. Will’s upper body hangs over the alpha’s thighs, and he braces himself against the marble floor.

“You may hold onto my ankle if you need to.” Hannibal says gently. “And you will not be punished for crying. How many do you think you deserve?”

Will squirms. He grips the alpha’s ankle experimentally, then quickly lets go.

“30?” He ventures. “Is that enough?”

“Yes, sweet boy.” Hannibal coos. “30 will be plenty. I would like you to count for me. If you make a mistake, we start over. Understand?”

Will adjusts, trying to find a comfortable position. He cannot.

“Yes, alpha.” he answers. “I understand.”

The first smack comes without warning, earning a yelp from the omega. His ass is still sore from the previous night’s punishment; angry welts still raised. Breathily, Will counts.

“O-one.”

The next comes fast and hard, drawing tears to Will’s eyes.

“Two.” He says, his voice breaking on the word.

Three, four, five. The smacks continue, and Will dutifully counts every one. On thirteen, he stumbles, and Hannibal seems amused.

“Four- *thir* - thirteen.” The omega stutters, hiccupping back tears. The alpha tuts.

“What was that, Will?” Hannibal asks.

“Thirteen.” Will says quickly. “Thirteen, alpha.”

“Are you sure?” Hannibal presses, humor in his voice. “Perhaps we should start over.”

“ *No!”* Will nearly shouts. “ *Please* , alpha, no. It was thirteen. Please keep going.”

“We’ll keep going, then.”

And they keep going. There are no more mistakes, Will taking the time to settle his breathing and enunciate clearly between each smack, even as tears fall from his eyes. When 30 hits, Will counts it quickly, then presses his hands on the alpha’s thigh in an attempt to stand. Hannibal holds him down by the shoulders.

“Wait a moment, Will.” Hannibal instructs. “Take some time to calm down.”

The omega lays across the alpha’s lap, Hannibal rubbing his back in slow, smooth circles for a few minutes. His breathing slows.

“Now you may stand, Will.” the alpha says after a moment, and Will stands up.

“Stand by the other chair, hands on the arms as you did before.” Hannibal orders. “Leave your trousers on the floor.”

Will steps out of his pants, leaving them in heap on the floor with his boxers inside them. He makes his way to the armchair across the room, and bends over, his hands on the arms. He can feel the alpha’s eyes on him as he takes in the sight.

“Kneel in front of me, Will.” Hannibal says after a moment, and Will doesn’t wait to be asked to sink to his knees, crawling across the floor to the alpha’s feet. Hannibal hums contentedly.

“Good boy, Will.” The alpha coos. “Very good. I think you’ve earned another chance.”

“Thank you, alpha.” Will says, eyes fixed on Hannibal’s shoes.

“You will have to be careful, behaving so well.” Hannibal says softly, humor in his voice. “I will come to expect it from you all the time. Look at me.”

Will peels his eyes upward to look at the Alpha. Hannibal leans forward in his seat.

“One chance, Will.” The alpha says, holding up his forefinger. “You get one more chance. If it happens again, the jacket goes. Do you understand?”

“Yes, alpha.”

“Good boy.” Hannibal leans back, patting his thigh. “Come here.”

Will stands, then lowers himself onto the alpha’s lap, anchoring his arms around his neck as he had before. Hannibal presses a kiss to Will’s scalp.

“You’ll have to be careful.” Hannibal says absentmindedly. “You never know who will be hanging around crime scenes, snapping pictures.”

“It’s never happened before.” Will mutters. He adjusts in the alpha’s lap, trying to find a comfortable position. The ache in his ass is intense, never truly having gone away from the night before, and now intensified by another spanking.

“You can expect it to happen again.” Hannibal responds. “Ms. Lounds is not going to drop you so quickly. She believes she has found quite the story in you.”

“Does she know?” Will asks. “That I’m-?”

He stops short, unable to finish.

“She does.” Hannibal confirms. “It was mentioned in her article. Though, she was more focused on your psyche than your omega status.”

“I’m sure that won’t last.” Will mutters bitterly. “When she finds out about how I went into heat at a crime scene, she’ll take it and run with it.”

Hannibal hums against the omega’s scalp, his hands holding Will by the waist. Will squirms again.

“Uncomfortable?” Hannibal asks, amused.

“A little.” Will admits.

“I’m not surprised.” the alpha responds. “This is the third night in a row you’ve earned a spanking. If you don’t behave, you’re going to find it difficult to sit at all.”

Color rises to Will’s face at that. He ducks his head, avoiding the alpha’s gaze. Hannibal pushes against his lower back.

“Up, Will.” He says simply. “Come to my office. I think you will appreciate what I have planned for training.”

“You mean this wasn’t training?” Will asks, something between a joke and a whine. He stands from the alpha’s lap.

“*This* was a punishment.” Hannibal answers, rising from his chair. “It will not get you out of regular training.”

“I’ll keep that in mind for the future.” Will snarks.

“I suggest you do.” The alpha answers, his tone colder than the omega would like. Will suppresses a shudder.

Will pulls his pants back on and follows Hannibal to his office. The alpha opens the bottom drawer of his desk and pulls out a squat, glass jar with a metal lid. The glass is a dark, translucent brown, and a flowery label wraps around the front, pictures of lilacs adorning it. Will furrows his brow,

“It is balm.” Hannibal explains. “It will help with the soreness.”

Will fidgets.

“Are you gonna put it on me?”

“Yes.” Hannibal responds, tone gentle. “If you’ll allow me.”

“I can say no?” Will asks.

“You can always say no, Will.” Hannibal responds. “Though, there will always be consequences for doing so.”

“What’s the consequence this time?”

“I suppose the only consequence this time is the ache in your backside.” Hannibal says. “It will heal more slowly, it will be sore for at least the rest of the week.”

“I don’t want it.” Will says quickly. Hannibal sighs.

“Come on, now.” Hannibal says gently. “I’ve seen the way you’ve winced each time you’ve taken a seat today. The welts on your backside are raw.”

“Then let me put it on.”

“That would defeat the purpose of training.” Hannibal sighs. “What’s so difficult about this, Will? You were across my knee with your pants down only moments ago downstairs. Surely this would be more pleasant, so why is it more difficult?”

Will fidgets.

“You know why.”

“I’m sure I do.” Hannibal responds. “But I would like you to tell me anyway.”

“I just don’t want to!” Will says, his voice becoming a whine in frustration. “I- it’s not like I *enjoyed* what took place downstairs, and as long as I have a choice, I’m *never* going to do that kind of thing willingly.”

“But you did have a choice downstairs.” Hannibal counters. “I could have taken the jacket instead.”

“Not much of a choice.” Will mutters.

Hannibal is silent for a moment, studying the omega with pensive eyes. Finally, he pulls the drawer back open and replaces the jar inside of it.

“Fine.” he says. “If that’s how you feel, we’ll forgo the balm for now.”

Will blinks, surprised in the alpha’s acquiescence.

“That’s it?”

Hannibal makes his way to the couch and sits. He gestures to the omega.

“Come here, Will.” He says. “Kneel in front of me.”

Will fidgets.

“And do what?”

“Talk.” Hannibal says simply. “It is your first day back at work, there is much to discuss. You seemed shaken on the phone.”

Will hesitates for a moment. Part of him wants to argue, but the other part isn’t keen on pushing his luck. Ultimately, he steps over to the alpha and drops to his knees.

“It was pretty heinous.” the omega responds from his place on the floor. “The only thing left to identify the victims by were dental records.”

“Even the living one?” Hannibal asks.

Will squints.

“How did you know about the living one?”

Hannibal grins. “I’m afraid Ms. Lounds’ article may have spoiled your story.”

Will laughs.

“Well, the living one died on the way to the hospital, so he didn’t really fare much better than the others.”

The room is silent for a beat. Then, the alpha speaks.

“It sounds gruesome, indeed.” Hannibal says. “But this is not what had you shaken.”

Will swallows.

“I saw Hobbs.” He says. “Out in the field.”

“An association?” Hannibal asks.

“A hallucination.” Will responds flatly. “I saw him lying there, in someone else’s grave.”

“Did you tell Jack what you saw?”

“No!” Will almost laughs. “Of course not.”

The alpha studies the omega for a moment,

“It’s stress.” He says finally. “Not worth reporting. You displaced the victim of another killer’s crime with what could arguably be considered your victim.”

Will scoffs. “I don’t consider Hobbs my victim.”

“Then what do you consider him?”

“Dead?”

“Is it harder imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing,” Hannibal asks, “now that you’ve done it yourself?”

Will hesitates, swallowing thickly. Shakily, he nods. Hannibal examines him, eyes narrowed.

“The arms.” Hannibal says suddenly. “Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? To feel the life leaving their bodies?”

Will shakes his head.

“No,” He says flatly. “That’s too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line. He’s more practical.”

“He was cultivating them.”

“He was keeping them alive.” Will says. “He was feeding them intravenously”

“But your farmer let his crops die.” Hannibal says.

“*They* weren’t the crops.” Will corrects. “They were the fertilizer. The bodies were covered in fungus.”

“I told you earlier” Hannibal says. “That the structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain. They communicate, thoughts leaping from brain to brain; evolving, mutating.”

“So maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t.”

Hannibal grins.

“Yours can.”

Will laughs

“Um yeah, not physically.”

“Is that what your farmer is looking for?” Hannibal asks. “Some sort of connection?”

Will narrows his eyes.

“Maybe.” He says. “I- I think he’s a beta. All of his victims were alphas or omegas, but I don’t think *he* is. I think he envies connection- the way alphas and omegas can connect.”

“And mushrooms?”

“And mushrooms.”

“Well.” Hannibal says, rising from his spot. “It sounds like you have much of this riddle figured out. I hope this conversation hasn’t spoiled your appetite for dinner.”

*

When Jack picks Will up the next day, Will can smell the anger coming off of him in waves.

“I’m guessing we didn’t catch our mushroom farmer.” Will snarks as he buckles his seatbelt, and Jack grunts.

“We didn’t.” he says harshly. “And you can thank Freddie Lounds for that.”

“I saw she wrote another article.” Will responds. “She was at the crime scene yesterday?”

“Posed as a mother of one of the boys who found the victims.” Jack answers. “She was able to pull a good amount of information out of a local officer. She took a particular interest in *you* .”

“I heard.” Will grimaces. “What did she say?”

“You didn’t read the article?”

“I only saw the photos.”

“She had a lot to say.” Jack says with a tilt of the head. “She said you could empathize with the mentally unwell due to some certain… mental eccentricities of your own. She mentioned you had your own criminal history.”

“Criminal history?” Will asks. Jack shoots him a look.

“Illegally obtaining suppressants, *Will* .” He says with a shake of his head.

“Oh, yeah.” Will says lamely. For some reason, the illegal nature of his old life had never really occurred to him.

The car is silent for a moment. Then, Jack slams his hand against the side of his steering wheel.

“We had the bastard!” He shouts. “Eldon Stammets. We had everything! His places of employment, his address! We found a girl in the trunk of his car for Christ’s sake! And now we have no idea where he is because of a red-headed alpha who can’t keep her mouth shut!”

Will blinks. “You found a girl in his car?”

“Gretchen Speck.” Jack answers. “Omega recently emancipated from her abusive alpha husband. She’s in the ICU now. You were right, he’s burying them in pairs.”

“She’ll lose her emancipation.” Will says quietly. “For having a major medical episode.”

“Yeah, well, we have bigger things to worry about.” Jack responds curtly. “Because Stammets is going to be looking for another omega as quickly as he can.”

Jack pulls into a parking spot and puts the jeep in park, and the pair enter into the FBI’s labs.

*

“We got a profile on the 9 victims.” Jack tells Will as they walk into the forensics lab. He clicks a remote, and 9 photos are projected onto the screen on the wall.

“All diabetic, like you said.” Beverly speaks up.. “And all unmated. Three of the omegas were emancipated, and one was an adult living in the custody of her parents.”

“Marital status is something he’d have access to, right?” Will asks. “In their charts, as their pharmacist?”

“Right.” Jimmy answers. “And the emancipated omegas would be flagged as such, since many live alone which could cause issues if they’re recovering from surgery or something similar.”

“It seems like he preferred the emancipated ones.” Zeller speaks up. “The other one, Madison Streets, was taken nearly a month after the last victim, whereas all the other omegas were taken the same week as their alpha counterpart. I guess he likes ‘em broken.”

“He likes fixing them.” Will corrects. “He’s burying them side by side, around the same time. He’s weaving them together into his own little family, his- his pack.”

Zeller snorts. “So you think he’s doing this because he’s lonely?”

“He’s looking for connection.” Will says. “Mushrooms communicate, they’re all wired together in a big neural network underground, sending electrical pulses back and forth. He feels like this is the closest he’ll get to a pack of his own, since he’s a beta.”

“Betas can join packs.” Zeller says flatly. “Someone’s gotta cook dinner during mating season.”

“Right.” Will allows. “But he’s not satisfied with his role as a beta. He’s jealous of the way alphas and omegas connect, and he wants that kind of connection himself.”

“So, who’s he jealous of?” Beverly asks. “Alphas or omegas?”

“Both.” Will says simply. “I think at this point, he’d take whatever he could get.”

The lab is quiet for a moment. Then, the silence is broken by the shrill ring of Jack’s cell phone. He pulls it from his pocket.

“I’ve got to take this.” He says gruffly, and steps out of the room.

“Has any more evidence come up?” Will asks, absentmindedly, to the remaining agents.

“We got a few prints off of Gretchen Speck.” Beverly answers. “But there’s not much more *to* get. We know who it is, we’ve just gotta catch him.”

“And thanks to *Tattle Crime*, he was a step ahead of us last night.” Jimmy says bitterly. “Though hopefully, Jack put a stop to that.”

This piques Will’s interest.

“Why?” He asks. “What’d Jack do?”

The three agents exchange uncomfortable looks. Beverly answers.

“He caught up with Ms. Lounds at her motel room last night and threatened legal action if she writes about you again.” She says. “She contaminated the Shrike’s cabin, so he has the grounds.”

Will swallows. “How flattering.”

“She wrote some pretty nasty stuff about you.” Beverly continues. “She said you can catch the criminally insane because you’re criminally insane yourself. Which she supported with your history on suppressants.”

Zeller snorts. “Everybody watch out. He’ll take a pill and smell neutral.”

“It’s bullshit.” Beverly agrees. “Obviously what you did is nothing like *this.”*

She gestures to the photos on the wall.

Will nods absentmindedly.

“Is Jack still here?”

“I think I heard him run out the door.” Beverly answers. “Why?”

“Do you guys need anything else from me?”

“I don’t think so. We’re just waiting on more information right now.” Beverly responds. “*Why?* ”

Will fidgets.

“I’d like to run an errand while I’ve got the time.” He answers.

“Where?”

“Um.” Will says. “John Hopkins Hospital.”

“You want to see Abigail?” Beverly asks. Zeller clears his throat.

“I don’t think alpha would like that very much.” He mutters, just loud enough to be heard.

“Hannibal doesn’t care as long as I get back by five.” Will says. “I haven’t seen her since… since that day. I just want to see if she’s okay.”

“She’s in a coma.” Jimmy points out.

“As okay as one can be,” Will amends. “When they are in a coma.”

Beverly shrugs.

“I don’t see anything wrong with that.” She makes eye contact with the two beta agents in the room with her, one by one. “Will’s an adult, after all.”

The other two agents look at the floor.

“Just go, Will.” Beverly says. “I’ll cover for you if Jack gets back.”

Will grins. “Thanks, Bev. I’ll owe you one.”

*

Will takes the bus to John Hopkins hospital, and is pointed to Abigail's room after flashing his badge at a receptionist. As he nears the girl's room, he can hear a familiar voice, speaking softly, and is surprised to see Alana Bloom sitting on the edge of Abigail's bed, a book unfolded on her lap.

"He and the Grandmother discussed better times." Alana is saying as Will enters the room. "The old lady said that, in her opinion, Europe was entirely to blame for the way things were now. She said-"

"What are you reading?" Will asks, catching Alana off guard

"Flannery O'Connor." Alana answers, looking over her shoulder with a smile. "When I was Abigail's age, I was obsessed. I even tried to raise peacocks because she raised peacocks. But they were really stupid birds."

"You could be reading to a killer, you know." Will points out. "That's what Jack thinks."

"Innocent until guilty and all that." Alana says. "Besides, you don't think Abigail is a killer. Do you, Will?"

Will shakes his head. "Garret Jacob Hobbs killed alone."

Alana is quiet for a moment. Then,

"I'm about to broach the subject of that *Takes One to Know One* article."

Will winces.

"Oh, that." He says. "Did Jack tell you to bring it up?"

"No." Alana says. "I told me to bring it up."

"Yeah," Will says. "I'm not particularly excited about being known as 'Jack Crawford's crime gimp'".

"It certainly creates an image." Alana replies. "I don't need to talk about it if you don't."

"No, no," Will responds quickly, "we can talk about or not talk about whatever you want. Actually, I was- I was just enjoying listening to you read."

Alana is quiet for a moment. She looks at Abigail, sleeping motionless in the hospital bed. Her heart monitor beeps unwaveringly in the background.

"Abigail Hobbs is a success for you.": Alana says finally.

"She doesn't look like a success." Will says quietly. Alana scoffs.

“Will, I know a lot has changed for you since the Garret Jacob Hobbs incident, but don’t feel sorry for yourself because you saved this girl’s life.”

“I don’t.” Will says quickly. “I don’t feel sorry for myself, not for that. I feel, um”

Will falters for a moment, trying to find the right words.

“I- I- I feel, um, good.” He finishes lamely.

Alana is silent for a beat, examining the omega with pensive eyes. Then, she begins reading again. Will takes a seat on the couch, legs outstretched, and listens.

*

Hours later, Will wakes up to the shrill ring of his cell phone. He is lying on the couch in Abigail Hobbs’ hospital room. A thin blanket has been spread over him, and Alana is gone. He knows hours have passed, the sunlight that had streamed in through the window when he arrived this morning being replaced with the dark of night. He reads the small screen on the front of his phone: Jack Crawford. Will takes in a breath, bracing himself, and flips his phone open.

“Where the hell are you and why isn’t it home?” Jack barks into his ear.

“I stopped by the hospital.” Will answers sheepishly. “I wanted to check on Abigail. I fell asleep.”

“Will, listen to me.” Jack says gravely. “You need to get out of there and go home. Stammets knows about you, and he knows about Abigail, and he’s looking for another omega.”

“He knows about Abigail?” Will asks. It’s at this moment that he notices that Abigail’s heart monitor, a constant in the small room, isn’t beeping. He looks at the bed and sees that Abigail is missing. He rises from the couch, adrenaline pumping through his veins.’

Will can hear Jack shouting at him through the phone as he rushes into the hallway, but he ignores him, snapping his phone shut. He addresses the first nurse he sees, speaking quickly, wildly.

“Where is she?” Will demands. “Abigail Hobbs, the girl in 408. Where is she?”

The nurse stammers, caught off guard.

“They took her for tests” she responds.

“*Who?* “ Will presses, desperate “Who took her?!”

“I don’t know!” The nurse responds, and Will tears away in a sprint.

He makes his way to the stairs. He takes them two at a time until he reaches the first floor, rushing into the back hallways. He finds Stammets, a skinny beta with a receding hairline, wheeling Abigail on a gurney towards the back exit, and rushes up behind him. Stammets

hears the omega, a few feet away from him, and turns, brandishing a pistol in hand; but he is shaky, unsure, his stance unpracticed. Will doubts the man has ever fired a gun before.

Will easily ducks out of the way as Stammets fires a shot, and brings his elbow up against the beta's nose. He grabs the weapon with both hands, and sweeps his leg forward behind the beta's feet, knocking him to the ground. With the beta on the floor, Will takes the gun and fires a single shot into his shoulder, ending the struggle for good. Stammets groans in pain.

"What were you gonna do to her?" Will spits, glaring down at the beta.

"We all evolved from mycelium." Stammers croaks. "I'm simply reintroducing her to the concept"

"By burying her alive?"

Stammets groans, twisting in his spot on the floor. His gaze meets the omega's

"The journalist said you understood me." He hisses. "She said you can think like me, that you can understand people like me."

"Well, she was wrong." Will responds, tone dangerous. "You and I have nothing in common.

"But you would have." Stammets whispers. "You would have understood. If you walk through a field of mycelium, they know you are there. They know you are there. The spores reach for you as you walk by. She could have reached for you, Will. I could have buried her with her alpha, and then, when you reached for her, she could finally reach back."

Will stumbles backward, disgusted, and the door behind him bursts open. FBI agents rush forward in full garb, and Jack Crawford's voice follows them.

"FBI!" He shouts. "Get on the ground!"

The agents swarm Stammets, easily locking him in handcuffs. They stand him up and march him forward, past Will, and out the door. And then, Jack and Will are alone.

"You're lucky he didn't kill you." Jack spits, glowering down at the omega. "But now, I'm going to have to."

"I think that right's supposed to be reserved for Hannibal." Will snarks. "Legally speaking."

"What the hell happened?" Jack shouts. "I came back to the precinct and you were gone. Beverly said you went home. Then, I find out Freddie Lounds ran her mouth again, so I call Hannibal to make sure he can keep an eye on you, and he hasn't seen you at all. Do you think this is funny, Will?"

Will shakes his head.

"I don't. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to." He says all at once. "I meant to just stay a couple of hours and be home before Hannibal noticed, but then I fell asleep. I didn't wake up until you called."

“You shouldn't be sneaking off places hoping your alpha won’t notice,” Jack says flatly. “You know you can’t work if he says you can’t, right? I thought you wanted to save lives.”

Will winces. He hasn’t even considered how Hannibal will punish him yet. He’ll be lucky if he only loses his job.

“I’m sorry.” He says again, not knowing what else to say.

Jack exhales, examining the omega for a moment. His voice is softer when he finally speaks.

“Come on.” He says. “I’ll take you home.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

So happy to FINALLY come back to this fic. I had to put it down (along with all my writing) because my partner and I just bought our first house, which was very exciting!! Unfortunately, between moving out of the apartment, into the house, and having to stay with the in-laws fr a week, I was without a pace to write for almost a month :(

I did technically promise that this would be out yesterday, but it's important to keep in mind that I am a liar who is destined for the flames of hell.

I think I also told someone it was 10k+. See above.

BUT! Here it is, and it's out. I decided to cut this scene off and publish it by itself, hence the shorter word count. The good news is that the next chapter is already about half written s hopefully it won't be too long of a wait.

I ended up getting kind of distracted from this fic bc I thought of another Hannibal fic which I can't stop thinking about even though I'm not sure I will ever even publish it :o) The other fic is much softer and very different from what I usually write, even though I've already written like four scenes for it that aren't connected to anything. It's real clown hours

Anyway this one's about 7k. Hope you guys enjoy!

Jack pulls into Hannibal's driveway and puts the car in park, but Will doesn't move. The omega has been silent the entire drive, head ducked and shoulders pulled up around his neck. Jack feels a pang of guilt looking at him, his anger having long worn off. It is Jack who breaks the silence.

"Will." He says softly, but the omega doesn't respond.

"Come on, Will." Jack sighs. "Don't look so sad. You saved Abigail's life, you know. *Again* ."

Will looks up at Jack, his brow knit together with shame. His voice is small when he speaks.

"No," He says. "You were right. I shouldn't have done that. There's no way Hannibal will let me go back to work after this."

Jack exhales, running a hand over his face.

“I mean, it’d be a lie to say I was disappointed in you, Will.” He says. “At the end of the day, you did what any agent would have done. We’re just all supposed to pretend you don’t do that stuff any more.”

Will studies the man next to him for a moment. He says nothing. Jack speaks again.

“You told me a while ago,” Jack continues. “At the Cassie Boyle scene, that you weren’t an omega. I’ve thought about that a lot since… everything came out. The thing is, it’s kind of true. I guess I expected you to act different when you got off the suppressants, but you’re the same as you ever were. And I’m glad for that. You were a hell of agent, Will- you still are,”

“I’m not an agent any more.” Will mutters. “I’m a consultant.”

Jack sighs.

“You’ve got to learn to play the hand you were dealt, Will.” he says. “I know the team is stronger with you on it, so you’ve got to find a way to *stay* on it if you want to save lives.”

Will nods, but says nothing, eyes cast down to his lap.

“I’ll talk to Hannibal.” Jack says. “Tomorrow morning, alpha to alpha. He’s not unreasonable, Will, I think he’ll understand.”

Will looks up. “Do you think so? Really?”

“I think I could convince him.” Jack says. “But right now, you’ve got to go in there and face whatever he has in store for you.”

Will swallows, looking towards the alpha’s home. The light in the foyer is on.

“He’s not going to be happy.” Will says.

“I wouldn’t be either, if you were my omega.” Jack agrees. “But I think, more than anything, he’ll just be glad you’re safe. Now go, I’ve got my own house to get home to.”

Will grins, despite himself, and opens the car door. He makes his way up the drive onto the front steps of Hannibal’s manor. The front door opens as he climbs the stairs, and Will’s smile disappears.

Hannibal stands in the doorway, still dressed in his suit from work. His expression is unreadable, but Will can smell the anger coming off him, more potent than he’s ever smelled before. He ducks his head involuntarily, fighting the urge to cower.

Hannibal looks past Will, raising a hand to acknowledge Jack, still sitting in the driveway. Jack taps his horn and pulls away. Then, the alpha turns his attention to the omega.

“Come inside.” Hannibal says, his voice a low growl. “Quickly.”

Will obeys.

“It is kind of you to decide to come home after all.” Hannibal says dryly, closing the door behind the omega. “I was beginning to think you wouldn’t.”

Will swallows. He says nothing, finding solace in the pattern of the rug, which has grown familiar over the past few days. Hannibal speaks again.

“Do you really have nothing to say for yourself?” The alpha asks. “I was looking forward to the excuse you’d come up with this time.”

Will inhales. The alpha’s voice is cold, dangerous, yet his words are almost playful. Will is reminded of the breakfast they shared at his home in Virginia, the way the alpha had effortlessly toyed with him in his own home. The tone is different now, there is no veneer of friendliness, but he knows the alpha is toying with him once again; daring him to challenge his captor the way he has since arriving in the manor.

And Will knows he will regret it if he does.

He is reminded of the Miranda Rights, the rote he recited for years as a policeman. *You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and* will *be used against you.*

“Well?” Hannibal asks when the omega does not respond. Will peels his eyes up to look at the alpha’s face.

“I’m sorry.”

“Are you?” Hannibal asks. “Or are you sorry you got caught? Everything you have done since arriving at my home has been done in an effort to evade my authority. Even now that it has nearly cost you your *life* , I don’t believe you think you’ve done anything wrong at all.”

Will swallows, his eyes dropping back to the floor.

“I *am* sorry, alpha.” He perseveres. “I didn’t mean for it to happen.”

“You didn’t mean to leave work early without my knowledge?” Hannibal shoots back. “You didn’t mean to board a bus and go to John Hopkins Hospital without my permission? Accidents happen, Will, but this is far-fetched even for you.”

Will suppresses a growl, annoyed by the way the alpha speaks to him. He exhales, focusing on keeping his expression and tone even.

“I didn’t mean to fall asleep.” Will says finally. Hannibal snorts.

“That does not exonerate you, Will.”

The alpha’s tone is viscous. Will shrinks in his spot.

“I just wanted to see Abigail.” Will says, voice small. “I was worried.”

“Then why didn't you *ask,* Will?” Hannibal balks. “I am not unreasonable, I would have driven you if you had *asked* me! Instead, you do everything behind my back as if I have been anything but lenient with you from the start.”

Will turns his face away, his gaze focused on the line where the marble floor meets the wall. He says nothing.

“You could have *died* today, Will.” Hannibal says, his voice softer.

Will turn his head to face the alpha, meeting his gaze.

“I saved Abigail’s *life.* ” He spits. “*Again.* ”

With a shake of his head, the alpha sighs.

“So you’re not sorry after all, are you?”

Will glares into the rug. He says nothing.

“You understand that you are going to be punished,” Hannibal asks. “Don’t you, Will?”

Will shrugs, flippant, and reaches for his belt.

“Then let’s get it over with.” He says, pulling his belt loose from the buckle.

“What are you doing, Will?” Hannibal asks, his tone borders on amused.

Will meets his gaze, caught off guard. He stammers once, then twice.

“You said you were going to punish me.” he finally manages.

“You think this can be solved with a simple spanking?” Hannibal asks in disbelief. Will falters in his spot.

In an instant, Hannibal has the omega by the collar of his shirt and is dragging him up the stairs. Will stumbles, trying to keep up. His hands hold desperately at the waistband of his slacks, slipping down his hips without the aid of his belt. His face reddens, his dignity lost yet again in a scuffle with the alpha.

Hannibal drags the staggering omega through the hall, passing the bedrooms, and even the office where his training sessions were carried out. He brings him to a door at the very end of the hall, which Will recognizes as one of the few locked interior doors he had encountered on his first day at the manor.

Hannibal pulls a ring of keys from his pocket, and quickly locates a long silver key, its bow shaped into the tarnished image of an anatomical heart. He maintains his grip on the omega’s

neck as he unlocks the door.

The door swings open and the alpha clicks on the light, a dark brass Victorian-style chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling. Its bulbs are hooded by stained-glass shades, which wash the room in dim, golden light. Will's eyes widen as he is pushed through the door.

He understands immediately why the door was left locked. The room is something out of bodice-ripper, the depraved dime-novels marketed to omega women. His mouth goes dry as he surveys it from wall to wall, sure the alpha has paused purposely to allow him to get a good look.

The room is furnished in luxurious reds and deep browns, accented with shining black and gold. A four poster bed sits in the center of the wall to his left, adorned with a deep red, silk bedspread. Restraints are fastened to each of the bed's posts. The bed sits on a wooden frame that spans from the mattress to the floor, interrupted by a set of sleek iron bars which enclose a small nook lined with a plush red mat that reminds Will of a dog bed: a cage for an omega to sleep in.

At the foot of the bed, parallel with the frame, sits a wooden contraption that reminds Will of a sawhorse. Propped up four thick, wooden legs is a straight, thin plank lined with leather. On one half, two thick planks are placed low to either side, lined with the same black leather as the plank in the middle; on the other half, a bit higher, sit two slightly thinner versions of the same leather-lined planks. Restraints hang loose from the four side planks, and Will tries to imagine how the object is used. Arms, he decides, are fastened to the higher, thinner planks, and legs to the lower, thicker ones. That way, the omega would be left in a hunched position on all fours, not quite presenting but close to it, forced to withstand whatever abuse the alpha deigns to inflict.

Against the wall, just in front of the leather-lined bench, are two sturdy planks of wood nailed together in an 'X' shape, restraints hanging loosely at each corner. The wood is painted a jet black, and the restraints shine, golden and leather, against it. Will can imagine its use easily: forcing the omega to maintain a standing position, nose to the wall, as the alpha delivers blows to their back.

Stretching from the X-shaped cross to the corner of the room, the wall is lined with all sorts of instruments, like something out of a Hustler's catalogue. Will recognizes only the most vanilla among them: a paddle, a riding crop, several pairs of handcuffs, thick leather collars in multiple sizes. There is plenty on the wall that perplexes him: a bundle of three thin dowel rods, fastened together with a strip of leather on one end, and something resembling a feather duster. His eyes follow the line of the wall, hopeless to observe every item hung there, and rests on the most perplexing thing of all.

The room is outfitted with glossy oak hardwood throughout, except for one corner of the room, where brick appears to have been laid in a small square. Hanging from the wall is a thick, golden chain, fastened to the wall in a loop suspended between two golden O-rings. Forking from the loop is a short length of chain, and from its end dangles a metal clip, the kind where the latch is oval-shaped with a hollow in the middle. A long, thin padlock hangs from the latch, key still placed in its keyhole. Will can't imagine how this area is used at all.

Finally, next to the door, against the wall, is a deep red Victorian-style sofa. It faces the rest of the room, a perfect vantage point for an audience. Will wonders, distantly, if guests are ever invited to this room, to sit on the sofa and watch. He suppresses a shudder.

“To be honest with you, Will,” Hannibal says, amusement in his voice. “I did not believe I would be taking you here so soon.”

“What are you going to do to me?” Will asks, his voice a raspy whisper.

Will had never imagined the alpha to be hiding this sort of thing. He’s reminded of cases he read about in college: sexual sadists with grimy basements full of homemade instruments of torture. He had always found the pictures difficult to look at; a collection of strange devices for which he couldn’t imagine a function, smeared with blood and semen.

“I’m going to sit you in the corner and allow you some time to *think* about what you’ve done.” The alpha answers easily.

He marches Will to the brick-laid corner by the neck before unhanding him all at once. Will stumbles, nearly falling, before catching himself on the wall. His slacks fall to his knees.

“Remove your trousers.” Hannibal says flatly.

The alpha busies himself with the items on the wall and Will hesitates, his own eyes scanning the wall in an attempt to anticipate his punishment. He winces when the alpha pulls a thick leather collar from its hook. There is a small padlock laced through its buckle, with a small, silver key jutting out from its bottom. Hannibal removes the key with a twist and turns to the omega.

“Trousers. Now.” The alpha repeats, turning to face the omega. Will swallows.

He removes his slacks with shaky hands, kicking his shoes off with them, and tosses them behind himself on the floor. He tries to shrink away when the alpha reaches for his neck again, but Hannibal catches him easily by the blue leather around it. The alpha spins the collar so that its buckle is against the front of Will’s throat, and deftly unfastens it. Will’s throat bobs as Hannibal pulls the collar away and places it in his suit pocket.

“Look here.” Hannibal instructs, spreading the thick, black collar open to bare its insides. Two forked pieces of metal protrude from either side, about a quarter of the way from its golden buckle.

“Do you know what this is, Will?” the alpha asks

Will shakes his head.

“It is a prong collar.” The alpha explains. “These prongs will be situated against your scent glands, and they will remind you to keep still if you move too much. These are useful for omegas who need to be reminded to behave.”

Will raises his hand to his throat, absentmindedly feeling his scent glands. They are swollen and pulsing, pushing out fear pheromones into the air. He swallows.

“Those are considered cruel on dogs.” Will mutters bitterly, hoping to appear unfazed.

“You are not a dog, Will.” Hannibal responds easily, stepping behind the omega to fasten the collar around his neck. Will hears a click as the alpha secures the padlock. “You are more than a creature of instinct. As long as you behave and remain still, it will not hurt you.”

With the collar fastened, The alpha takes a step back and examines the omega. It is not painful, not yet, but Will can feel the prongs sitting heavily against his scent glands. An incorrect move of the head would be painful, and to tug on the collar would be brutal. Will swallows.

“Kneel.” The alpha says after a moment, gesturing to the brick floor with a wave of his hand. Will’s eyes roll downward to examine the space.

He understands perfectly, now. The brick was laid to dig into the omega’s knees as they knelt in the corner. The hardwood, he supposed, was not cruel enough. The golden chain, secured in a vertical loop, would put pressure on the omega’s collar if they moved from their position in any direction. The prong collar was the final piece, to intensify the omega’s pain further. Combined with the unyielding chain, the omega couldn’t stand to alleviate the pain from their knees; nor could they adjust so that their thighs, protected by a layer of fat, could take the brunt of the discomfort. Anything other than kneeling perfectly still in a woefully narrow window of space would dig the prongs into their scent glands, sending pain radiating through their body.

“*Will* .” Hannibal warns, the omega still standing. Will swallows and sinks to his knees.

The jagged surface of the brick digs into his knees, and Hannibal crouches, taking the golden O-ring of his collar in hand. Will yelps as Hannibal tugs the O-ring forward to secure it to the chain on the wall, and shuffles forward on his knees; the brick scrapes painfully against his skin. In one swift movement, the alpha secures the O-ring to the latch on the chain with the padlock and removes its key.

“I am going to run an errand.” Hannibal says, rising. “You are going to kneel here for 2 and a half hours; the same amount of time I waited for you to arrive home. Don’t do anything foolish.”

And with that, the alpha makes his exit, closing the door behind him.

The discomfort is immediate, and the pain follows shortly after. Minutes into his punishment, Will finds himself shifting from knee to knee, trying to alleviate the pain pricking his skin. He tries straightening his back. He tries leaning backward, then forward. He tries to switch positions, so that he can sit instead of kneel. Every movement, no matter how careful, is cut short by the prongs tightening against his neck, threatening to dig into the sensitive glands they rest against.

He finds himself in a cycle, beginning with an effort to kneel properly until the pain in his knees becomes too great. From there he begins making tiny movements from side to side, rocking in place to alleviate the pressure on his knees without triggering the prongs in his collar. When that grants him no relief, he tries to ease himself into a different position,

slowly, trying to find a way to evade either element of his punishment. And when this pulls the collar taught, sending a shock of pain down either side of his throat, he returns to kneeling, straightening his back and attempting to match the alpha's idea of correct posture.

The cycle quickens with every reprise, spiraling until the omega begins to feel crazed by it. Soon, he finds he can hardly keep still at all. The kneeling, the head of his rhythm, is whittled down to a few seconds at a time. Quickly, he finds it too painful to remain still and is taken over by the urge to move, desperate to alleviate the pressure from his knees. He rocks erratically, whimpers pouring from his throat, as he is again and again denied relief. Again, he thinks of another position, one he hasn't tried before, wherein perhaps his thighs or his buttocks could take the brunt of pressure against the rocky floor; and again he cries out when the prongs stab into the sides of his neck.

The prongs find their mark more and more frequently. He forgets them quickly in his desperation to evade the rocky floor beneath him. Each squeeze of the collar leaves his scent glands more sensitive, each reaction it pulls from him is more visceral. Sobs erupt from his mouth as he tries to regain his kneeling posture, only to be overwhelmed by the pain in his knees within seconds.

He realizes all at once that he has no idea how much time has passed. There is a window in the room, to his left, but it is covered by a heavy, red curtain. He doubts it would have been helpful anyway, showing him nothing but the dark, blank, Baltimore sky.

A clock, he realizes, might have been placed in the room. He can't remember whether he'd seen one or not when he entered. He thinks he hears it ticking, or rather, he thinks he had heard it ticking before; at the moment, he cannot hear anything but the blood rushing in his ears.

His eyes scan the wall to his right, the one lined with BDSM toys, but he finds no clock. He turns his head carefully to examine the wall to his left, but is no more successful. He twists his head slowly to look at the wall behind him, and cries out when the prongs stab him once again. He turns back to the corner, raising a hand to his throat.

He racks his brain, trying to calculate how much time might have passed. He knew it was not especially late when he'd apprehended Stammets; the winter sun had set, of course, but only recently. It was just after 7:00 when he'd climbed into Jack's car, and it was about a 15 minute drive from the hospital to the Lecter manor, so he had been secured to the wall before 8:00. The alpha had said he had waited 2 and a half hours for Will to arrive home, so his punishment probably began shortly after 7:30 PM.

He was sure it had been at least 15 minutes; the drive to the manor felt dwarfed by his time kneeling in the corner. Then again, maybe it only felt that way because of the pain. He checks his wrist for his watch, although he already knows it hasn't been returned since his stay in the hospital. Has it been 30 minutes yet? His torment felt at least twice as long as his lecture from the alpha downstairs.

Where was the alpha going, anyway? He had taken Will's collar, tucked into the pocket of his suit. Perhaps he would return it, and force Will to wear the thick prong collar from now on. He wouldn't be able to hide this one in the collar of his jacket, and the alpha would be able to

punish him easily whenever he pleased. Perhaps the alpha would attach a leash to it, pull him around the way Will had seen alphas tug their omegas through the streets in the worse parts of town.

He imagines being pulled behind the alpha, the collar giving him a painful stab each time he fell behind. He reaches for the chain in front of him, pulls it toward himself. There is a slight relief, the collar loosened as the chain is pulled closer, but it is quickly forgotten; so slight that Will isn't certain he hadn't imagined it all together. He drops the chain and the prongs return to their resting place on either side of his neck, pulled just slightly from the pressure of gravity on the chain. Will swallows.

He tries shifting from knee to knee again. His knees are red and scraped, small pieces of brick embedded in the skin. He can smell blood, and worries distantly about infection. Did the alpha really leave him here, trapped in one spot? What if something happened? The house was old, what if the wiring failed, engulfing the home in flames?

Will imagines himself losing consciousness, breathing the smoke-filled air until he collapses in his spot. Would he asphyxiate from the smoke? Or would he be cooked to death by the fire? Would the alpha return to the charred remains of his home and collapse to his knees in despair? Would he regret what he'd done? Or would he justify it to himself and find another omega to fill Will's place- one more willing to abide by his rules?

It occurs to Will that the alpha may not have left at all. It seemed uncharacteristically irresponsible, to leave the omega trapped with no one else in the house. Maybe he was downstairs, watching a timer countdown the minutes, eager to rush upstairs and make amends.

But that was certainly optimistic.

Perhaps, Will thinks, the alpha was keeping tabs on him some other way. A camera would not be out of the question, especially in a room like this. Turning his head gingerly to the right, he examines the wall behind the sofa, and yes, there it is. Perched a few inches below the ceiling, secured to a mechanical arm so that it can change positions, is a small black camera with a blinking green light. Will turns back to the corner, not wanting the alpha to catch on to his discovery.

He wonders whether it can record audio, if the alpha had heard him whimpering in pain. Perhaps if he cried out, feigned a serious injury, the alpha would rush home and release him. Or, maybe if he began thrashing, crazed and overwhelmed by his punishment, the alpha would come for him and cut the punishment short to prevent him from injuring himself. If not, however, he would only exacerbate his pain for the remainder of his time here. Was it worth the risk?

Will shakes his head. Even if he managed to feign an injury well enough to convince Hannibal, there was no guarantee that the alpha wouldn't simply have him kneeling on the

brick again the next night. Besides, the alpha always seemed to be able to tell when he was lying.

No, he would withstand it. Hadn't he been through worse? He recalls his time in the police academy, before getting sworn in as an officer. He had been pepper sprayed and tased in order to learn the gravity of wielding both of those weapons himself. He hadn't even cried then, he remembers, standing with his muscles locked until the pain subsided. Why did he seem so fragile now? Why did he seem to crumble beneath everything the alpha did to him?

He wonders if it was the suppressants. The little, white pills had dulled his sense of smell, his emotions. What else had they dulled? Could he be more sensitive to pain without them? He shifts his knees and winces, feeling more skin scraped away by the brick beneath them. Perhaps, without the suppressants in his system, he was cursed with the low pain tolerance of a real omega.

He squeezes his eyes closed, trying to reel his mind back to himself. He was going to withstand it, he had to. He had to focus, and focus on something other than the time that had elapsed, the release from his punishment. Those things would drive him crazy, they were out of his control. He had to focus on staying calm and still. He takes in a breath.

1, 2, 3, 4.

He holds the breath. He fights to quiet his mind, dull the pain in his knees.

1, 2, 3, 4.

He breathes out. He thinks of somewhere else, somewhere he is free from the alpha's control

1, 2, 3, 4.

Another breath in. He thinks of his home in Virginia, his dogs following in a pack as he leads them into the woods.

1, 2, 3, 4.

He holds his breath again. In his mind's eye, he makes a place on the edge of the lake with his tackle box in hand.

1, 2, 3, 4.

He readies the lure, ties the fishing line. His dogs laze behind him, finding warm places in the mid-day sun.

He continues this way for a while. It helps, it really does. He can feel the pain in his knees only when he brings it to the front of his mind. At any other point, he is with his dogs, fishing in the lake near his home. He can even hear the birds sing.

He is pulled from his mind only when he hears the front door open and shut, pulling a relieved sigh from his lungs.. The alpha is home, his punishment is over. The alpha will be climbing the stairs to release him in a moment.

But he doesn't hear footsteps climbing the stairs. He is sure someone is home; he can hear them walking downstairs, the old floor creaking rhythmically with their movements. The footsteps, however, seem to be receding further into the house, away from the stairs.

Perhaps it is not the alpha, after all. He knew Hannibal had staff, housekeepers and gardeners, but it seemed quite late for that. Maybe the alpha had instructed someone to come over and wait downstairs, so that Will could be released if he was in danger. Maybe his punishment was not about to end after all.

Or, maybe it was an intruder, a thief preying on what they believed to be the empty home of a wealthy alpha. What would they do if they found Will here, bottomless and chained? Surely no alpha could resist such an opportunity. Would Hannibal find him here, his boxers ripped, the scent of a strange alpha all over him? Would he punish him for being 'unfaithful'? He did not think Hannibal was that kind of alpha, but he had been wrong before.

Will shakes the thought from his head. He reprimands himself for having such a childish fear, like a schoolboy left home alone for the first time. He's sure it is the alpha downstairs, who else would it be? Perhaps he had arrived home earlier than expected, maybe the store he'd wanted to visit was closed. The alpha was a lot of things, but not dishonest; he would come for Will when his time was over, he believed that.

Then, that left the same problem as before: how long had Will been here?

Will winces and he shifts his legs again. The pain has ebbed a bit, his knees are more numb than anything else. Still, sharp pin pricks of pain stab into them when he moves.

Surely his punishment is almost over now, Will reasons. The alpha was home, so he had to be released soon. He stills, listening for the creak of the stairs. When nothing happens, his lips

pull into a grimace.

Two and a half hours was a long time to spend kneeling on the rough brick. Will felt like he'd been kneeling for ages, but he had no way of knowing. It would not surprise him to learn that an hour had not even passed. Time felt strange in this position, endlessly long yet impossibly short. Maybe he had hours more to wait.

Or maybe the time had passed already. Maybe the alpha had checked the camera, and felt unsatisfied at the way the omega knelt quietly, mostly still. Maybe he was extending his punishment on purpose, waiting until the omega was a sobbing mess, the way he was after a spanking. Maybe the alpha was dishonest, after all. What would keep him from lying to the omega, if he wanted to?

"Hannibal?" Will calls, then corrects himself. "A- Alpha!"

There is, of course, no response.

He calls again, louder. "Alpha! Are you home?"

He listens for the alpha, but hears nothing at all. Now, he can't even hear the footsteps downstairs.

Will fidgets. What if the alpha wasn't home after all?

This was an old house, the kind to make noises at night. Perhaps he had just heard the house settling and assumed it to be the alpha, arriving home to release him. Perhaps he had imagined it all together, the way he had imagined Hobbs in Stammets' mushroom garden.

Will tries to quiet his mind, put himself back with his dogs at the lake, but then he hears footsteps again. He stills, and listens.

He hears nothing but the wind, blowing the branches of a tree against the window. Far away, a dog howls.He can feel the panic rising in his chest.

"Hannibal?" He calls again.

He tugs the chain in front of him, this time earning a painful stab as he fails to let go before his hands put pressure on the chain. He cries out.

"Hannibal!" He calls again. "Please, I know you're there!"

He tries to twist, to look at the door, and earns another stab in the neck.

He cries out again, and twist back into place. The movement scrapes his knees harshly, and he can see the blood, bright, wet, and red against the brick. Tears sting his eyes.

"Alpha, please!" He cries. "Please, it hurts!"

His breathing is ragged now, quickened by panic. He shakes in his spot.

He tugs on the chain again.

Another stab to his neck.

He shuffles forward on his knees, and tugs again and again.

He's not coming. Will thinks, tears spilling down his cheeks. *He's not coming for me.*

Without thinking, he jumps to his feet, and makes a gagged noise as the collar wraps around his throat more tightly than it ever has before. The chain forces him into a crouched posture, legs and back bent to accommodate it. The tears roll down his cheeks now..

He grabs the golden chain and pulls it toward himself as hard as he can, hoping to pull it off the wall. When it doesn't budge, he places his foot on the wall and pulls harder. He screams when the collar digs into his neck, and collapses forward, giving sharp, desperate pulls at the chain. With each pull the collar delivers a painful stab into his neck. He feels blood dripping onto his shoulders.

"Let me go!" He cries out.

Tears are streaming down his face. He decides to change tactics. He reaches for the leather around his neck, tucks his fingers into the top, and pulls with all his might. Another painful stab is delivered into the bloody glands on his neck.

"Get off!" He sobs. "Let me go!"

He moves his hands to the sides of the collar, alternating between clawing the leather downwards, and pulling it outwards. The prongs scrape brutally against his fingers, and he feels them sticking together with blood. Whether it's the blood from his neck or new blood drawn from his hands, he doesn't know.

"*Stop* !" He sobs. "Get off! Let me go!"

"Will, stop that!" comes the alpha's voice from behind him.

Will twists to look at the Alpha, rushing towards him. He realizes he's never seen the alpha concerned before. Even at Hobb's death, Hannibal had been withdrawn and collected. Now, as he rushes to the omega's side, Will sees him worried for the first time.

"Get it *off!* " Will sobs. "Get it off of me."

"Be still." Hannibal orders. "You will only hurt yourself more."

The alpha wraps his forearm around the omega's chest, pressing him against his own. Will continues to thrash in spite of himself.

“Calm yourself.” Hannibal says, slowly lowering the omega to the ground. “I can’t remove the collar if you don’t stop moving.”

A sob breaks from Will’s throat, and trembling replaces his thrashing as the alpha lowers him to his knees. He cries out when his abused knees make contact with the brick.

“There we are.” The alpha soothes. “Give me just a moment, sweet boy, I have to unlock it.”

Will hiccups back sobs, waiting silently as the alpha sets to work behind him, gently maneuvering the thick collar. He hears the click of the padlock, and feels the collar tighten, then loosen, as Hannibal unfastens it. Finally, the collar falls to the floor in front of him, and Will twists his body away from the corner of brick, his hands flying to his neck.

“Hands down. Let me see.” Hannibal orders, grabbing the omega’s chin and angling it to expose his neck.

Will drops his hands to his side and squeezes his eyes shut, tears rolling down his cheeks as he waits for the alpha to inspect him.

“You will be fine.” The alpha says, releasing Will’s chin. “It won’t scar. Come with me to the bathroom and I will dress your wounds.”

Hannibal leads Will to the room’s bathroom through an oak door positioned next to the wooden cross and seats him on the toilet’s lid. He opens the medicine cabinet and pulls a first aid kit from its shelves. Then, he kneels in front of Will and sets to work.

He begins with the omega’s knees, washing them and applying an antibiotic ointment. He takes Will’s ankle, straightening his leg before he wraps gauze around the knee, and then does the same on the other leg.

“You did quite a number on yourself.”” Hannibal says flatly, eyes cast down as he secures the bandages on the omega’s knees.

“Please never do that again.” Will whispers, voice small and raspy.

Hannibal meets the omega’s gaze.

“Then don’t give me a reason to.”

The alpha’s voice is cold and even. The omega shudders.

Hannibal rises and places the kit on the bathroom counter, adjusting to treat the omega’s neck.

“Look this way.” He orders with a snap of his fingers, and Will turns his head to the side.

The omega hisses as the alpha applies the antiseptic to his neck, then bites his lip when he catches the smirk on the alpha’s face. Hannibal cleans the blood from Will’s neck with soft

dabs of a cloth, then applies a large, rectangular bandaid over the site.

“Turn your head.” He instructs, and begins to dress the other gland the same way.

“I did not expect you to panic like that.” Hannibal says after a moment, pulling the backing off the second bandaid. “Do you tend to react that way when trapped?”

Will exhales, unsure how to respond.

“I don’t even know what happened, really.” He says softly. “I felt like I was going crazy. It seemed like it was just going to go on forever. And then I just lost control.”

“And you don’t remember ever losing control like that before?”

With the omega’s wounds dressed, Hannibal takes a step backward, meeting the omega’s gaze. Will shakes his head.

Hannibal examines the omega for a moment before speaking.

“Give me your hands.” he says simply.

Will obeys, and Hannibal gently cleans the blood from his fingers with the damp cloth. Will is relieved to find that none of the skin on his hands was broken; one less injury to explain when he returns to work- if he returns to work.

“How long had it been?” Will asks as Hannibal cleans the blood from his nail beds. “Did you leave me there longer than you said?”

Hannibal's eyes flit upward to meet the omega’s.

“It had been just over an hour.”

Will swallows thickly.

“Does that mean I have to do it again?”

Hannibal sighs, avoiding the omega’s eyes as he busies himself with the omega’s blood-stained fingers.

“No.” The alpha answers finally. “If you promise to behave yourself, we will call things even for now.”

Will fidgets, looking at his lap as Hannibal moves the cloth to his left pinkie, the last digit to be cleaned. He feels he should thank the alpha, or perhaps apologize, but the moment seems to have passed, so he remains quiet.

With all of Will’s injuries addressed, Hannibal drops the cloth in the sink and puts his hands on the omega’s shoulders, crouching so that they are eye to eye.

“Look at me, Will.” Hannibal says, and Will peels his gaze upward to meet the alpha’s eyes. “Do you understand why I did this to you?”

“You were mad at me.” Will says softly. “For sneaking out.”

Hannibal’s lips tighten.

“Do you understand *why* I was angry with you, Will?”

“I broke the rules.” Will responds. “I disobeyed you.”

Will drops his gaze, and Hannibal sighs.

“It is more than that, Will.” He says, gently lifting the omega’s chin to reestablish eye contact. “You put yourself in grave danger tonight. Stammets is a dangerous man, he could’ve killed you. He shot a man in cold blood this morning, nothing would have stopped him if he decided to do the same to you.”

Will swallows. He remembers Stammets’ stance, the shaky way he’d held his gun. If he had killed before, why was Will able to disarm him so easily? Was he nervous?

No, Will realizes, he was excited. He was moments away from adding two prize omegas to his pack. Will swallows thickly.

“If you endanger yourself like this again,” Hannibal continues. “a punishment of similar severity will await you at home. It is my responsibility as your alpha to ensure your safety. I do not do these things for fun. Do you understand?”

Will nods, dropping his gaze, and Hannibal lifts his chin again, more forcefully.

“Answer me properly, Will.” He says. “This is important.”

“I understand, Alpha.” Will says, his voice catching in his throat. “I’m sorry.”

“Are you going to do it again?” Hannibal presses. Will quickly shakes his head.

“No, never. I promise.”

“Good boy.” The alpha says, rising to full height. He opens his arms. “Come here.”

Will rises from his seat, and Hannibal pulls him into an embrace. The omega wants to pull away, but he can’t fight the relief that blossoms in his chest. Without his permission, his arms tighten around the alpha’s back, and Hannibal responds in turn, pulling him even closer. A sob breaks out of Will’s throat, though he doesn’t know why he is crying, and he buries his face in the alpha’s shirt.

They remain this way for a while, Will crying softly into the alpha’s chest. Hannibal rubs smooth circles over the omega’s back, mumbling consolations against his scalp. Will only pulls away when his tears have dried.

He peers up at the alpha with wide eyes and Hannibal smiles softly back down for a moment. And then the moment is over.

“Come.” The alpha says. “We still need to eat dinner.”

Will winces.

“Do I have to eat on the floor?” He asks. “On my knees?”

“I will provide a thick cushion for you.” The alpha says. “And some painkillers, to ease your discomfort.”

Will whimpers.

“But, still.” He whines, gesturing to his bandaged knees.

“Part of your punishment is the soreness, which will take weeks to fully heal.” Hannibal explains. “Each time you kneel for a meal, you will remember that you were punished and why. This way, the lesson will not be forgotten easily.

Will looks down at his bandaged knees. Walking is already uncomfortable, he can’t imagine kneeling on them, even on a cushion.

“Come, Will.” Hannibal says, turning to lead the omega out of the room. “It is already late.”

As promised, Hannibal lays a thick, grey cushion in Will’s spot by his chair. He hands Will 2 white pills and a small glass of water, and Will takes them gratefully.

Will’s knees still ache when he kneels, but the pain eases gradually over the course of the meal. The cushion beneath him is a thick memory foam, which does a lot to shield him from the hard floor beneath. To his surprise, Will finds himself enjoying the meal.

The dinner is quiet, sleepy, and the conversation follows suit. Hannibal has prepared a pair of steaks, and lowers Will’s to his mouth on a fork, piece by piece. Will hadn’t expected the casual tone of the meal, the way he and the alpha trade jokes and share soft, tired laughter. He almost forgets the brutal punishment he’s just endured, and finds himself unable to conjure his typical defiance and resentment when he tries.

Before he knows it, the meal is over, and the alpha rises, offering Will his hand.

"Come.” He says, stifling a yawn. “It is time for bed.”

Will follows the alpha up the stairs, feeling sore and heavy all over.

“Neither of us will be going to work tomorrow.” Hannibal tells him as they ascend the stairwell.

“Will I be going in on Monday?” Will asks. Hannibal presses his lips together.

“That remains to be seen.”

The pair reach Will’s bedroom, and Hannibal pulls the door open.

“Wait until the morning to shower.” The alpha instructs. “I will redress your wounds afterwards.”

It occurs to Will to argue, to insist that he can do it himself. His exhaustion, however, implores him to simply nod in response as he enters the room.

“Is there anything else you need before bed?” Hannibal asks from the doorway.

Will shakes his head.

“I will see you in the morning, then.” The alpha says. “Please try to get some sleep.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

So, I hope we're all learning that if I mention a date in the comments, you can go ahead and take it with a grain of salt. Hopefully sooner is better than later, at the very least.

I'm a bit nervous about this chapter. On one hand, I like most of what's written- there's a lot of dialogue I'm pretty proud of, and it's our first real look at Freddie Lounds, who is one of my favorite characters to write. On the other, it is certainly a cool-down compared to the recent events of the fic, and I worry it might be boring. At the same time, a story cannot be all action, and I don't consider this chapter frivolous by any means- it covers a lot of important ground in regard to the rest of the fic. I hope you all will enjoy it for what it is, at the very least, even if it is not the most exciting chapter. It's a nice, long 17k

The next chapter could be out as early as next weekend, but keep in mind that only a fool would lend credence to my own assessment of my timing. In any case, it's already in the works, and it shouldn't be a terribly long wait.

Hope you enjoy!

Will awakens the next morning on his own, to sunlight and birdsong outside his window. His brow furrows, confused, as he reaches for the alarm clock on his nightstand:

9:24 AM

He sits up, returning the clock to its place, and wonders why the alpha had not come for him this morning. Hadn’t he been told that he was to wake by 8 AM? The alpha had woken him every morning so far, but maybe he was expected to set his own alarm. Had he already earned another punishment?

He groans as he rises, his knees screaming in pain as he straightens his legs. He wraps one hand around the back of his neck, feeling the glands on either side, and hisses when they respond with a sharp ache.

The bandages on his knees have formed fuzzy, pink ovals over his kneecaps, where blood has leaked all night. The bandages on either side of his throat have loosened with his nocturnal tossing and turning, and irritate the wounds beneath them when he moves his neck. He hopes the alpha would be lenient with him. Besides the injuries he’d acquired last night, his backside still aches when he sits down. He is running out of body parts that don’t hurt.

He hobbles to his bedroom door and pulls his bathrobe off its hook, wrapping it around his body. He turns the doorknob and peers down the hallway. The door to the alpha's office is open, streaming lamplight onto the dim floor of the hallway. He ties the belt of his robe and hobbles that way.

“Good morning, Will.” The alpha says when the omega appears in the doorway. He types away on his laptop, not looking up.

“I’m sorry I woke up late.” Will says quickly, and the alpha exhales a soft laugh.

“Don’t worry about it, sweet boy.” Hannibal tells him, still focussed on his computer screen. “I decided to let you sleep in this morning, since you had such a taxing night. I’m honestly surprised to see you up this early.”

Will swallows, unsure. He didn’t think of the alpha as the type to bend rules.

“Are we going to have breakfast?” Will asks after a moment, unsure what to make of his disrupted routine.

Hannibal’s eyes flit away from the screen for a moment.

“Are you hungry?”

Will nods. Hannibal’s eyes return to his screen.

“I’m afraid I’ve already eaten.” Hannibal replies. “But I left a portion for you in the refrigerator. You may eat it at the table, If you like.”

Will hesitates.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m afraid I have too much work to abandon it for a second breakfast.” Hannibal responds, still typing. “I will join you for lunch, okay?”

Will nods, and turns to leave the alpha’s doorway, but is stopped short.

“Will, wait.” Hannibal says quickly. The omega stops in his tracks.

“Shower after your breakfast, alright?” The alpha says, looking at the omega properly for the first time. “When that’s done, come and get me, so I can see to your wounds.”

“Alright.” Will sighs, and makes his way to the stairs.

He takes the first few steps too quickly, and pulls himself to a stop, both hands gripping the banister so tightly his knuckles turn white. While he could hobble through the halls without much pain, taking the stairs at a normal pace sends pain shooting through him with every

step. He slows, taking each step carefully and using his arms to ease the pressure from his knees.

When Will finally reaches the bottom, there is a knock at the door.

Will fidgets. He looks at the door, then back up the stairs. Is he allowed to open the door? It would take too long to get the alpha, unable to climb the stairs without pain. Would the alpha be angry with him if he answered?

Another knock raps on the door, then the doorbell rings. Will hobbles forward and opens it.

“Will!” Alana Bloom blinks, A manila folder clutched to her chest. “Good morning. Can I come in?”

Will steps backwards, pulling his robe tighter.

“Um, I don’t know.” He says. “Hannibal is upstairs. I- I’m not really dressed.”

“Don’t worry about that, Will.” Alana says. “I had brothers.”

Will swallows, taking another step back,

“Still, I don’t know how Hannibal-”

Alana scoffs.

“I promise you Hannibal won’t mind.” Alana says, taking the omega’s retreat as an invitation to step into the home. “I’ve known him longer than you have. He doesn’t mind an unannounced guest, as long as it’s a friend.”

“Would you like a cup of coffee?” Will asks, unable to deny his southern hospitality as the beta shows herself to the alpha’s kitchen. “And is there- um- is there a reason you’re here?”

“Yes.” The beta responds. “And Abigail Hobbs woke up.”

Will stills, eyes widening at the news. He shuffles to catch up with the beta.

“And you want to talk to Hannibal about it?”

“I want to talk to *both* of you about it.” Alana corrects as the pair cross the threshold into the kitchen. “Do you want me to get you a cup of coffee?”

“I think I’d rather get changed.” Will says, casting a look at the kitchen door.

“Let’s have a cup of coffee.” Alana retorts, reaching for the alpha’s kettle. Will shifts uncomfortably at the familiar way she navigates the alpha’s home.

“Allow me.” The alpha’s voice comes from behind him. Will jumps at the sound.

The alpha crosses the floor and takes the kettle from the beta's hand, which Alana relinquishes with a shrug.

"Fine by me." She says with a grin, stepping out of the way to stand by Will. "Hannibal makes the best coffee in the world."

"I haven't tried it yet." Will admits. Alana seems surprised.

"Really? Why not?"

"I try to avoid caffeine when I can." Hannibal answers from the counter, spooning coffee beans into an electric grinder. "And since Will didn't request it, I'm afraid it was overlooked."

"Avoiding caffeine when your coffee tastes like that?" Alana teases. "You never cease to amaze me."

"The secret is fresh beans." Hannibal says, and the beans grind with a whir of the machine. "You must grind them just before you steep them."

Alana turns to Will with a grin.

"I bet you've been eating well." She says. "No more microwave meals for you."

Will chews the inside of his cheek, unsure how to respond. What would Alana say if she knew Will was avoiding meals? That Hannibal had to threaten him with a feeding tube to get him to eat breakfast?

"I'll be the one omega that never has to cook." Will offers, a half-hearted attempt at a joke. Alana returns the gesture with a laugh.

Moments later, Hannibal turns from the counter carrying three, steaming mugs.

"Join us in the dining room, Alana." He says.

"Cream and sugar?" Alana responds.

"Cream is in the refrigerator." Hannibal says. "And there are sugar packets next to the French press."

The alpha exits to the dining room as Alana busies herself with the refrigerator. Will hobbles behind, panic rising in his chest.

Will reaches the alpha's side as he places the mugs at the head of the table.

"Hannibal." Will says, voice just above a whisper. "Do I have to-"

"That's not how you address me, Will." Hannibal warns as he slides one mug to the seat to his left.

“I’m sorry, alpha.” Will says quickly, voice still quiet. “I want to know where I-”

“I grabbed some sugar for you, Will.” Alana says brightly, bursting through the door. “I wasn’t sure how you take it.”

Will stiffens.

“Thank you.” He says. “But I- I, um, take it black, No sugar.”

“More for me.” Alana chirps, and takes her seat.

To her right, Hannibal seats himself at the table’s head. The pair look expectantly at Will, who fidgets,

A quiet, awkward moment passes. Alana clears her throat and busies herself with her coffee. Hannibal turns to his omega, taking his hands in his own.

“Is there something you wanted to ask me, Will?”

Will fidgets. When he speaks, his voice is so quiet he can barely hear it himself.

“I wanted to ask-”

“You will have to speak up, Will.” Hannibal interrupts. “I cannot hear you.”

Will stiffens. His eyes dart to Alana, who is politely pretending to be enamored by the process of pouring cream into her coffee. Will swallows, then speaks, a little louder.

“I don’t know where I’m supposed to sit.” He says finally.

He looks at the alpha, then gives the smallest gesture he can manage towards Alana. The alpha follows Will’s gaze to the beta, then nods, understanding.

“It is only coffee. Will.” He says softly, giving the omega’s hands a squeeze. “You may join us at the table.”

Will relaxes, relieved, and takes his seat to Hannibal’s right. The pair look to Alana, who is concluding her performance with a drawn out stir of her spoon. When she is sure the couple are done, she places the spoon on the table and looks up as if she has just finished.

“So, Abigail Hobbs woke up.” She says, tone casual.

“I saw.” Hannibal says. “I suppose that’s what you came to discuss?”

Alana furrows her brow.

“You saw?” She asks. “It’s not in the papers yet.”

“No newspaper can publish a story faster than Freddie Lounds.” Hannibal laughs.

“You shouldn’t read that drivel.” Alana frowns. “Half of it is lies.”

“I take it with a grain of salt, of course.” Hannibal says over the rim of his mug. ”I find the photos fascinating.”

With this, Hannibal shoots Will a wink as he takes a sip of his coffee. The omega casts his gaze to his lap.

“Jack wants Will to talk to her.” Alana says flatly, changing the subject. This catches the omega’s attention.

Will looks up from his lap, first at Alana, and then at Hannibal. The two are looking at each other, eyes narrowed, as if the omega isn’t there. Moments pass, the table encompassed in silence. Then, Hannibal speaks.

“I don’t think it’s wise.” He says, and Alana sighs in relief.

“That’s what I told him!” Alana says, giving a breathy laugh. “I mean, eventually? Of course. But now?”

“It’s much too soon.” Hannibal agrees. “Not just for Abigail, but-”

“ *For Will, too!”* Alana finishes. “That’s exactly what I said! After the Stammets incident-”

“Which Abigail was present for, mind you.”

“Exactly!” Alana nearly shouts. “But Jack said it didn’t count because she won’t remember.”

Hannibal scoffs. “Will will remember.”

“And as if she won’t catch on to that!” Alana agrees. “And after all she’s been through.”

“Both of them.” Hannibal corrects. “Both of their lives changed that day.”

“It’s a recipe for disaster.” Alana affirms. “I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

The conversation stops then, alpha and beta falling silent to drink from their mugs.

“Do I get a vote?” Will asks flatly.

Alana sets her mug down, covering her mouth as she rushes to swallow. She clears her throat before speaking.

“I’m sorry, Will.” She says, her tone shifting to sympathetic. “I know you want to see her- and you will! You definitely will at some point. But at the moment-”

“It may retraumatize both of you.” Hannibal says softly. “Especially if your reintroduction is rushed. She may not respond as positively as you hope, Will.”

“And especially if you accuse her of helping her father commit murder.” Alana adds. “Which is what Jack wants you to do.”

“I’m sure Jack doesn’t want me to *accuse* her.” Will counters. Alpha and beta exchange looks.

“I don’t want to get in the middle of you and Jack.” Alana responds. “But if i can be helpful as a buffer-”

Will snorts.

“Well, if anyone can tell Jack ‘no,’ it’s you.” Will says, lifting his mug. “He respects you far too much to yell at you- no matter how much he wants to.”

Alana smiles warmly, leaning back in her seat.

“And I take advantage of that.”

The table is quiet for a moment. Will places his coffee back on the table without drinking it.

“Abigail Hobbs has no one.” He says, staring down at his mug.

“You can’t be her everyone, Will.” Alana says. “It’s not like- she’s not-”

The beta falters for a minute, then regains her composure.

“I said what I was going to say in my head, and it sounded really insulting. So, I’m gonna find another way to say it.”

“No.” Will objects. “Say it the insulting way.”

Alana looks at Hannibal, then at Will.

“I don’t know if Hannibal has told you I’ve been watching your dogs.” She says, clearing her throat. “And I- it’s been a really special experience. I can tell how much you you loved them, how hard you worked to take care of them-”

“But?” Will presses.

“But dogs keep a promise people can’t.” Alana finishes flatly. Will scoffs.

“I’m not collecting another *stray* , Alana.”

Alana looks to Hannibal, who dutifully relieves her of the conversation.

“Abigail woke up very early this morning, Will.” He says gently. “She hasn’t spoken to anyone besides hospital staff yet. The first person she speaks to about the events of her father’s death cannot be someone who was present for it. That means I couldn’t do it, either.”

“Much less the guy who killed dad.” Will mutters, eyes cast down at his hands, which lay flat on the table.

Alana leans forward and squeezes Will's hand.

"Let me reach out to her first." She says gently. "My own way."

*

At the end of a half hour, the pair bid Alana goodbye, Hannibal closing the door behind her. He turns to Will.

"You still haven't eaten." He says.

Will swallows.

"Alana kind of cut things short."

"Yes." Hannibal agrees. "Would you like to join me for an early lunch?"

"I thought you had too much work."

"I'm afraid Dr. Bloom has dashed my hopes of having a productive day." Hannibal sighs. "We may as well take another hour to eat."

Will follows the alpha to the kitchen, where he opens the fridge and begins placing ingredients on the counter.

"It was good of you to check with me, Will." The alpha says, placing a carton of eggs on the island. "About your seating arrangements. I cannot promise I will always grant you the privilege of eating at the table, but I was very proud of you for seeking me out to voice your concern."

Will swallows. "I was really grateful not to have to kneel on the floor with company."

Hannibal sighs.

"One day," He begins, closing the refrigerator. "You are going to realize that I am not as unreasonable as you make me out to be."

Will doesn't respond, watching as the alpha places a variety of vegetables in a colander. He turns to the sink and washes them.

"What are you making?" the omega asks after a moment.

"A frittata." The alpha answers, Turning to place the colander on the island. He pulls a wooden cutting board from the cupboard below. "Something hearty and simple, perfect for a late breakfast or early lunch. Would you like to help?"

Will fidgets.

“I’m not really good at cooking.”

“Nonsense.” The alpha says. “All I need you to do is chop some vegetables, it is hardly cooking at all.”

The alpha bends to retrieve a second cutting board. He places it across from himself on the island, and arranges three bell peppers on top of it.

“Wash your hands and cut the peppers.” He instructs.

Will obeys, quickly washing his hands in the sink before taking his place across from the alpha. He takes a knife from the block and cuts one side off the pepper, then stops short, hearing the alpha make a choked noise across from him. He looks up and the alpha is staring at him, face pulled into a grimace.

“What?” The omega asks. The alpha regains his composure, making his way around the island.

“You have to remove the seeds first.” He says, ushering Will out of the way. “Watch me.”

The alpha takes the pepper and places it horizontally on the cutting board, its missing lobe faced down.

“First, you remove the stem.” The alpha says, removing the pepper’s top with one swift movement of his knife. He holds the pepper up to Will, its cut top facing him.

“See the core?” He asks. “In the middle there? You run the knife around the sides to remove it.”

The alpha places the pepper back onto the cutting board long ways, the same way as before, and runs his knife in a circle around its insides. Then, he turns it upright.

“When that is done, you can remove it with your hand and discard it” The alpha says, pulling the core from the pepper, and tossing it to the side.

He makes eye contact with the omega.

“ *Then* , you slice it.” He says, and lops off a lobe of the vegetable. “For our purposes, we’ll be dicing them. So, cut them into matchsticks, then cut through them horizontally to make squares.”

As the alpha speaks, he cuts the lobe of pepper into long, rectangular sticks with four swift movements of his knife. Then, he runs the knife across the set the other way, so they are in small, square pieces. He looks up expectantly at the omega.

“Understand?”

Will nods, and resumes his place in front of the cutting board. He begins slicing the lobe of pepper that he had mistakenly removed too soon. Then, the alpha clears his throat, and Will stills, meeting his gaze.

“I’m dicing it.” the omega says defensively. The alpha snorts.

“Yes.” He agrees. “And you are nearly dicing your fingers with it. Hold it like this.”

Hannibal demonstrates on the tomato in front of him, holding it with fingertips tucked behind their lower digits, so that they are out of the way of the knife. He cuts a slice to demonstrate.

“This way, you won't cut yourself.” He tells the omega. “In Japan, they call this ‘a cat’s paw.’”

Will snorts, but follows the alpha’s instructions.

“I told you I couldn’t cook.” He mutters.

“Anyone can learn to cook, Will.” Hannibal says.

He slides the contents of his cutting board into a bowl and wipes it down. Then, he pulls a bundle of spinach from the colander.

Will realizes how slow his pace is compared to the alpha’s, and tries to speed up. His grip is clumsy and awkward when he tries to hold the peppers the way the alpha instructed, so he untucks his fingers as he reaches for the next pepper.

“What all goes in this?” Will asks absentmindedly, coring the pepper the way he was shown.

“It is a base of eggs and heavy cream, similar to scrambled eggs.” Hannibal responds. He slides the spinach from the cutting board to another bowl. “But first, we must cook the vegetables. I try not to overload them, so it is only tomato, spinach, and bell peppers. Then we will pour the egg mixture over them, and shortly after I will grate some gruyere on top. When the edges are cooked, we will transfer it to the oven, where it will finish cooking.”

“Gruyere?” Will asks.

“Cheese, Will.” Hannibal responds, setting his knife down. “It is a creamy, nutty cheese from Switzerland, though its flavor changes as it ages. Hand me that last pepper.”

Will looks up and realizes the alpha has finished cutting all of his share of vegetables in the time it has taken Will to cut a pepper and a half. Color rises to his cheeks.

“Sorry.” He mumbles, handing the pepper across the counter.

“Perhaps I shouldn’t have tasked you with the peppers.” Hannibal says, taking the pepper and swiftly removing its stem. “They must be the first to cook.”

Will’s lips tighten, and he quickens his pace as he dices the second pepper.

“What kinds of food are you used to eating?” Hannibal asks. “I recall Alana referencing a habit of microwave meals.”

“And cup noodles.” Will adds, grinning. “My diet was primarily fast and cheap.”

Hannibal exhales a laugh, giving his head a shake.

“All the sodium.” He snarks. “Would I even want to know your blood pressure?”

“Probably not.” Will laughs, drawing the knife across his row of bell pepper for the final time.

He cries out as the knife meets the skin stretched between his thumb and forefinger, cutting a shallow slice into the area. He brings the skin to his mouth and sucks the blood from it.

Hannibal sets down his knife with a sigh.

“Come here. Let me see.”

He maneuvers around the counter and takes the omega’s forearm in his hands, pulling his hand away from his mouth so he can see the wound.

“It’s not bad.” Will says quickly, color rushing to his face. “It just caught me off guard.”

“Were you holding the pepper the way I showed you?” Hannibal asks. Will ducks his head.

“I was, but I couldn’t keep hold of it.” Will admits sheepishly. “And I was already going so slow, I just needed a better grip.”

“And you were cutting towards yourself.” Hannibal tuts. Will’s face burns hotter.

“I didn’t think about it.”

Hannibal sighs, relinquishing the omega’s arm.

“If I had wanted it done quickly,” He scolds. “I would have done it myself. It’s important that you do things *safely* when you help me cook.”

“I’m sorry.” Will mutters, staring at the alpha’s shoes. “I told you I’m not good at this.”

“It isn’t a bad cut.” Hannibal affirms. “Just an unfortunate placement. Go upstairs and get a bandage, I will start cooking.”

Will makes his way to the stairs, and is reminded of the pain in his knees with his first step. He sighs and begins his climb, slowly and carefully, using his arms to assuage the pressure from his legs. He wonders how long it will take to move normally.

He reaches his bedroom and finds a first aid kit in the bathroom, tucked behind the mirror in the medicine cabinet. It is identical to the one Hannibal had used last night.

Will finds a small bandaid and secures it to the wound, but Hannibal is right: the placement is unfortunate. The bandage won’t sit flat unless Will stretches his hand, splaying his fingers

apart. With a sigh, Will replaces the kit in the cabinet and closes the door. He leaves the room and begins his slow descent down the stairs.

When Will returns to the kitchen, Hannibal is placing a cast iron skillet in the oven.

“Trouble with the stairs?” The alpha asks without looking up. Will winces.

“It hurts to bend my knees.” He admits.

“It wouldn’t hurt as bad if you had remained calm.” The alpha scolds. “Your squirming nearly cut them to ribbons.”

“Yeah, well, that’s easier said than done.” Will shoots back, annoyed.

The alpha closes the oven and turns his gaze to the omega.

“You found it quite taxing?” Hannibal asks. “To kneel and keep still?”

“On rough-face brick?” Will balks. “Yes, I did.”

A smug grin crosses the alpha’s face.

“Some prefer uncooked rice or grits, but I am quite fond of the brick. There is no mess to sweep up afterwards.”

Will hesitates. He recalls entering the room upstairs for the first time; the shock he felt, the intricacy of its details. He wonders how it came to be.

“How long have you had that room?” He asks quietly.

Hannibal eyes the omega from across the island, leaning against the counter with hands on either side of the stove.

“You found it unexpected?” He asks.

“You could say that.”

He eyes the omega for a moment, then turns his gaze to the oven. He pulls the door open and checks the baking frittata. Unsatisfied, he closes it again.

“I commissioned the room shortly after moving here.” He answers.

Will swallows.

“And has it… seen a lot of use?”

Hannibal raises an eyebrow.

“Some.” He answers. “Why? Does that make you jealous?”

"*No!*" Will answers quickly, color rising to his cheeks. "I was just wondering what a well-respected, omega trauma specialist is doing with a sex dungeon in his house."

Hannibal snorts.

"If it makes you feel better, my clients have gotten much more use out of the room than I have."

Will's brow furrows.

"What do you mean 'clients'?"

Hannibal checks the frittata again.

"My specialty is omegan trauma." Hannibal explains, closing the oven door. "But I work with many mated pairs. I've found that sex therapy is helpful for many of my patients."

Will scoffs.

"That can't be a real thing."

"What makes you say that?" The alpha asks with a raise of an eyebrow. "You find it difficult to believe that sex can be therapeutic?"

"I find it difficult to believe that anyone's insurance is paying for a night in your toybox."

Hannibal snorts at that.

"It is paid mostly out of pocket."

The alpha opens the oven to check the frittata again, then closes it with a frown.

"So why is there a camera in there?" Will asks sharply. "You like to watch?"

"Some couples enjoy keeping a recording as a souvenir." Hannibal answers, unfazed. "Alternatively, sometimes an alpha asks to observe their omega's punishment from outside the room, to give them the illusion of being abandoned."

"Like you did last night?"

Hannibal snorts.

"Do you think I would have left you there with no way to check if you were safe?"

"Maybe." Will shoots back. "I couldn't stop you if you wanted to."

"I would never punish you in a way that has the potential to actually harm you in the long term." The alpha says.

He opens the oven again, then pushes it closed with a sigh.

“Every time I open this door, I add ten minutes.” He tells Will, leaning on the oven’s handle. “But I can’t seem to stop myself.”

Will laughs.

“Anxious to get back to work?” He asks. Hannibal sighs.

“Dreading it, honestly.” he responds. “I shudder to think what will become of my inbox after being abandoned this long. Everyone seems to have their crisis on Friday.”

“What kind of crises does a sex therapist have to deal with?” Will asks, and Hannibal laughs.

“I did not mean to imply that my primary job was sex therapy.” He says. “If you must know, one of my alphas had their omega run away last night.”

This piques Will’s interest.

“And how did that work out for them?” He asks. Hannibal shoots him a look.

“Poorly.” He says flatly. “The same way you should expect it to work out for you if you ever find yourself inclined to try. He was found in an alleyway 3 hours later by local police. He had been assaulted twice.”

Will’s mouth goes dry at that.

“Oh.” Is all he can manage.

“Yes.” Hannibal says, pulling open the oven again. “It’s very tragic. They had mated only 3 months ago. An auction pairing.”

“What will he do now?” Will asks. “Does the alpha still want him?”

Hannibal looks up at the omega as he closes the oven, brow knit together with concern.

“Of course she does, Will.” He says softly. “Do you really think one would abandon their mate so easily?”

Will falters.

“But he- he ran away.” Will says. “Isn’t she mad?”

“Of course.” Hannibal replies. “You and I have been angry with each other more than our fair share of times, as well. Do you think I would abandon you?”

“But it’s different.” Will persists. “What kind of alpha would stand by an unfaithful mate?”

Hannibal studies Will from across the island, a look of disbelief on his face.

“You define being the victim of sexual assault as unfaithfulness?” He says slowly.

Will’s eyes widen.

“ *I* don’t!” He amends. “But for an alpha-”

“Will, that is an archaic point of view.” Hannibal says with a shake of his head. “Where on earth did you get such an idea?”

Will shrugs.

“I don’t know.” He says. “It’s just something everybody knows, isn’t it? That that’s something alphas will do.”

“Thank you for the flattering assessment of my dynamic.” Hannibal deadpans, peering into the oven again, despite himself. “It actually explains a lot.”

Will fidgets.

“I thought you were supposed to leave it closed.” He says.

“Yes.” Hannibal replies. “But now I am afraid of burning the damn thing.”

Will laughs.

When they finally eat, Will kneels on his cushion by Hannibal’s side. There are no painkillers today, and Will can feel the difference. He shifts from knee to knee, face pulled into a grimace, as Hannibal lowers him bites of the frittata

“Is that something your father told you?” Hannibal asks after a moment. “That an alpha will abandon an omega who was raped?”

Will swallows dryly.

“No, I don’t think so.” He says. “Not explicitly. Is it really that rare?”

Hannibal’s lips tighten. He lowers another forkful to the omega.

“Post-traumatic stress always puts strain on a relationship.” He says, by way of reply. “But the vast majority of alpha/omega pairings are lifelong. I don’t think I’ve ever seen that happen in my practice.”

Will fidgets as he chews, wincing at the pain in his knees.

“Is the omega in trouble?” He asks, swallowing. “The one who ran away?”

Hannibal sighs.

“I advised her not to punish him.” He says as he scoops another bite of frittata onto the fork. “It would damage the relationship further. What has happened is punishment enough.”

“Is that what you would do to me?”

Hannibal eyes the omega, fork poised above the plate.

“Have you thought about running away, Will?” He asks.

“No.” Will lies quickly.

“*Right*.” The alpha deadpans, unconvinced.

“Only a little.” Will corrects.

“That’s what I thought.” The alpha snorts, and lowers the next bite to the omega. “I would be more surprised if the thought hadn’t crossed your mind.”

“There would be no point.” Will says bitterly, ignoring the food in front of him. “I’m in your custody, so I’d just wind up right back here sooner or later.”

“Probably.” The alpha agrees. “As well as the danger you would put yourself in beforehand. Eat.”

Will ignores the alpha.

“I don’t think anything like that would happen to me.” Will argues. “I lived on my own for 28 years.”

“You’re not considering the circumstances, Will.” Hannibal retorts. “You would be homeless, without any form of ID that could aid you in securing housing. You would have little money, and no way of starting a bank account, which means no way of getting paid for a job. With no money, you couldn’t purchase suppressants to disguise your scent the way you had before. It is naive to think you wouldn’t be just as vulnerable as the omega who found himself in such a situation last night. *Eat* .”

At this, Will deflates, and takes the fork in his mouth.

“I could apply for emancipation.” He mutters, still chewing. “Stay in a shelter until then.”

“Keep your mouth closed while you’re chewing.” Hannibal says sharply. “And your emancipation would not be approved without stable housing.”

“Really?” Will balks. “Then what’s the point?”

Hannibal sighs.

“Many think of emancipation as the one true route to omega rights.” Hannibal says scooping more frittata onto the fork for Will. “But the truth is that it serves as a cheap substitution to prevent omegas from securing *actual* rights in the first place. It’s never worth the effort it takes to acquire, and most who pursue it end up at auction in the end, anyway.”

Will raises an eyebrow, leaving the fork poised in front of his face.

“So, if you agree that omegas aren’t afforded equal rights, then why do you support that system instead of advocating against it?”

“Because everything I’ve witnessed in the years I’ve dedicated to helping omegas has convinced me that this system, while imperfect, is the best available.” Hannibal replies simply. “Eat your breakfast.”

Will scoffs at this, and continues to ignore the food in front of his face.

“How do you figure?” He asks

Hannibal snorts.

“Will, do you expect me to believe that *you* were satisfied when you had your independence?” He asks. “You were burnt out, exhausted, and stressed to the point of an anxiety disorder. Your physical health was neglected, pushed to the brink of failing, and you didn’t even know how to *use* the suppressants you were obtaining. It is the same as every case of suppressant abuse I have witnessed in my career. The omegan mind and body are simply not meant to support themselves on their own, and omegas who try, destroy themselves.”

“But omegas wouldn’t *have* to abuse suppressants if we were just afforded the same rights as everyone else.” Will counters.

“And in the countries where that is the case, we see omegas abusing suppressants to avoid getting fired in favor of a beta alternative.” Hannibal responds easily. “Suppressant abuse is actually significantly higher in the Netherlands, where omegas can obtain them for themselves. Rates of satisfaction and fulfillment are lower in omegas there, and anxiety and depression is higher. There is no legislation that can counter biology.”

“So it’s better to just have no rights at all, then?” Will asks, incredulous. “So alphas can treat us however they want?”

“I heavily support expanding omegan *protections* , Will.” Hannibal corrects. “Because, you are right, it is easy for an omega to face abuse at the hands of their alpha.”

“But?” Will presses.

“But in the majority of cases, an omega’s alpha has their best interest at heart.” Hannibal says. “And, conversely, the majority of omegas who obtain independence wind up in worse condition than before. Eat your food, Will”

Will huffs, and turns his face away from the food being offered.

“That is such bullshit.” He mutters

“Watch your language at the table.” Hannibal replies sharply. “And *eat* the food I cooked for you, unless you want to earn another punishment.”

Will huffs and takes the bite offered to him. He avoids the alpha’s gaze as he chews.

The rest of the meal is quiet and tense, but Will accepts every bite the alpha offers him, not wanting to be punished again so soon. The alpha calls him a good boy as they rise from the meal, and Will rolls his eyes.

"Will, wait." The alpha calls as the omega makes his way out of the dining room. The alpha is removing the dishes from the table, taking them towards the kitchen to clean.

Will stops in his tracks and rolls his head to look at the alpha.

"You need a shower." The alpha says, paused in front of the kitchen door. "When that is done-"

"I *know* ." Will groans, interrupting. "Come and get you about the bandages."

The alpha narrows his eyes, but says nothing, taking the dishes into the kitchen. The omega heads upstairs.

Will takes his time in the shower, wanting to prolong the time before seeing the alpha again. The conversation at the table had annoyed him fiercely, and being threatened with another punishment had only fanned the flames.

He's growing annoyed with swallowing his anger, with being forced to show the alpha respect that isn't returned, but he's coming to learn that challenging the alpha is worse than fruitless. He is no match for the alpha in strength. He's lost most of the muscle he had since retiring from the police force, and even at his peak he was still short and mostly lean. He hadn't realized how much his strength had deteriorated until he found himself facing off against the alpha daily, but he's been made aware of his weakness more often than he'd like in the alpha's care.

He'd always thought of himself as fit, and he was. The dogs had kept him lean, spending his weekends hiking and running with the unleashed pack. He hadn't made time for strength training, though, and now he found his arms useless.

How did the alpha stay so strong, anyway? He knows Hannibal takes care of himself, watches his diet very closely. It wouldn't be surprising to learn that he dedicates some of his time to visiting a gym. But the difference between his strength and Will's? Was that really possible with only a couple of hours a week? Were alphas and omegas really that different?

Will finally turns the water off when it starts to run cold, and pulls a towel off the rack to dry himself. He looks down at his knees, red and redder still from the hot water. Most of the skin was scraped off of his kneecaps and the tops of his shins last night, but they no longer bleed. The flesh is wrinkled and pink from being covered by the bandages. They still ache whenever he moves his legs.

Will pulls on a fresh pair of boxers and a new T-shirt, then pulls on his bathrobe before going to seek out the alpha. His office door is still open, and Will can hear the alpha's voice, sharp with annoyance, as he nears the room.

“I spoke with Dr. Bloom this morning,” Hannibal is saying as Will enters the door. “And we both agree it’s too soon.”

“Is that Jack?” Will asks, approaching the alpha’s desk. “Put him on speaker.”

Hannibal looks up from his desk and shoots the omega a look. He presses a finger to his lips and returns his attention to the call.

“Yes, but that’s not my only concern.” Hannibal continues, responding to something unheard from the other line. “It’s not worth the risk to bring them together so soon.”

“Are you talking about me and Abigail?” Will asks.

Hannibal turns in his chair, so that he is facing away from the omega, and waves a hand at him dismissively.

“I see.” Hannibal says. “But even in that case, I would be reluctant to allow him back into the field so soon after his last incident.”

“What’s he saying?” Will presses. “Does he want me back at work?”

“Jack, I-”

“Can I talk to him?” Will interrupts.”I just wanna know-”

Hannibal pulls the receiver from his ear and presses it into his shoulder, turning to the omega with a dangerous expression.

“Will, *please* .” He says sharply. “I know you know it is rude to speak while others are on the phone!”

Will’s mouth clamps shut, and Hannibal retakes the phone.

“Jack,” Hannibal says, softer. “As I was saying-”

The alpha stops short, Jack interrupting him on the other line.

“Yes.” Hannibal says. “That’s him. He’s been-”

Another pause as Jack speaks on the other line. Will can hear his voice, gruff and low, but not make out what he says.

“Jack.” Hannibal says with a grimace. “I’d rather not encourage-”

The alpha stops short again, listening. He sighs before speaking.

“I see.” He says, resigned. “Alright.”

Hannibal presses a button on the phone's receiver, then places it in its cradle. He looks to Will.

"He asked to be put on speaker." He says, sheepish. Will stifles a laugh.

"Will," Jack's voice comes from the receiver. "You know Dr. Lecter better than I do. Could you please explain to him the importance of *time* in a murder investigation?"

Will looks to Hannibal, fighting a grin off his lips. The alpha's eyes narrow.

"Similarly, I could explain to you the importance of time during trauma recovery." He responds sharply.

"Dr. Lecter, with all due respect, I have seven families waiting- no, *demanding*- that we find what's left of their daughters." Jack responds. "Don't you think it may be worth the discomfort if Will can help these families find closure?"

Will watches the alpha, who exhales sharply.

"It is not mere *discomfort* , Jack." Hannibal retorts. "And it is not just Will I'm worried about! Reintroducing them too soon could stunt the processing of their trauma for *both of them* . Abigail may feel unsafe being made to see her father's killer so soon, and that might cause her to clam up and repress the experience further. Similarly, Will may be struck with guilt to see the girl struggling so soon after such an event, and begin to regress in his own progress. You may be sacrificing both the answers you want *and* the consultant you've fought to keep on your team."

The line is silent for a moment, neither alpha speaking. Will watches Hannibal, whose chest rises and falls with even breaths. He can feel the anger radiate off of him, and he ducks his head, fighting the urge to cower.

Finally, Jack speaks.

"Please excuse me, Dr. Lecter. I believe I may have overstepped my bounds." Jack says. "Could we try again?"

Will's mouth drops. He has never heard his boss sound sheepish before.

Hannibal smiles at this, his anger seeming to deflate all at once.

"It's quite alright." He responds easily. "Please, go ahead."

"If you say Will needs to wait, I can accept that." Jack says. "What I need to know is *how long* he needs to wait."

Hannibal fumbles.

"It's impossible to say, Jack." He says. "These things don't have timetables."

"How would we know *when* Will is ready?"

“Again, it’s hard to say.” Hannibal sighs. “Will is not the only variable to consider. It could take only days for them both to be ready, and it could take years.”

Jack hisses through his teeth on the other line.

“We certainly don't have years.” He says.

Hannibal falters for a moment.

“Perhaps this would better be discussed in person.” He says finally. “With Dr. Bloom, if possible.”

Jack sighs.

“Dr. Bloom will not be available until Monday.”

“I can make Monday.” Hannibal responds, unfazed. “Unfortunately this is not something that’s going to happen quickly, Jack.”

Jack sighs again.

“Fine.” He says. “Monday.”

“Am I invited?” Will asks, and Hannibal looks at him like he’s just remembered he’s there.

“ *Is* Will invited?” Jack asks.

Hannibal hesitates.

“I don’t necessarily see a problem-”

“Neither do I.” Jack retorts. “I will see the three of you on Monday.”

And then the line goes dead. Hannibal lets out a growl, which sends a shudder down Will’s spine. He turns to Will with a glare.

“We are going to be working on your *manners* , soon.” Hannibal warns. “If you undermine me like that while I am on the phone again, you will be punished.”

Will ducks his head.

“I’m sorry.” He says. “You said to come get you for-”

“Ah.” The alpha says, realization hitting him. “Yes, your knees. Let me see.”

With that, the alpha crouches and pulls Will’s robe up by the hem. Color rises to Will’s face.

“They already look better.” Hannibal says. “Follow me to the restroom.”

Hannibal dresses Will’s wounds while the omega sits on the toilet’s lid, just as he had the night before.

“When does it stop hurting?” Will asks as Hannibal wraps his leg in gauze, the alpha sighs.

“Usually, I would say one week, but for you…” He eyes the omega. “Maybe two to be able to move without pain, longer for the pain to fully recede”

Will shakes his head as the alpha rises from his place on the floor.

“Is that not a little extreme?” He asks. “A punishment that lasts that long, for missing curfew?”

Hannibal’s eyes narrow.

“Punishments are selected with the offenses that merit them in mind, Will.” He says. “What you did last night was not simply ‘breaking curfew.’ You deliberately evaded my authority and obscured information from both Jack and myself in order to do so- and it nearly cost you your life.”

Will casts his gaze to the floor.

“Still.” He says. Hannibal sighs.

“It’s difficult for you to accept,” He says. “The discipline?”

Will glares at the floor.

“It isn’t fair.” He says. “I’m not a child.”

“You are not a child.” Hannibal agrees. “Which is precisely why I expect you to accept the consequences of your actions gracefully. Turn your head so I can check the wounds on your neck.”

Will turns his head, and the alpha grips his chin, angling it further.

“These are healing nicely.” He says. “We got lucky, the wounds are fairly shallow.”

“They didn’t feel shallow.” Will mutters.

“It’s a sensitive area of the body, Will.” Hannibal says, angling the omega’s head the other way to see the opposite side of his neck. “Any injury on a scent gland is going to be considerably more painful than one on another area of the body, no matter how minor it is. This is because your body is wired to protect them, as scarring on the scent glands can cause issues with hormones and even reproduction, if they are severe enough.”

“Then, isn’t that dangerous?” Will balks. “To put on a collar like that? You said earlier you’d never punish me in a way that could hurt me long term.”

“The collar is designed to be used on the scent glands, Will.” Hannibal says. As he speaks, the alpha applies a small amount of antibiotic ointment to the omega’s neck.

“In typical use, they will never break the skin.” Hannibal continues. “And even with the amount of force you put on them last night, the prongs only left shallow scratches. I do think I will remain in the room the next time I use a prong collar on you, though. Other side.”

Will turns his head, and the alpha applies the ointment to the other side of his neck.

“I was hoping you’d say ‘That’s why I’ll never use a prong collar on you again.’” Will mutters, and Hannibal snorts.

“Punishments are meant to be aversive, Will.”

“Don’t worry.” Will deadpans. “They are.”

“And yet you seem to have made a habit of earning them.” Hannibal says with a tilt of the head. “What are we to make of that?”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been trying to earn them less since last night.”

“I could tell that you fought to hold your tongue at breakfast.” Hannibal agrees. “I suppose bloody knees have made more of an impact on you than spankings.”

Color rises to Will’s cheeks. He ducks his head.

“Truthfully, I’m just relieved to have gotten through to you.” Hannibal sighs, recapping the ointment. “I was beginning to worry that nothing would.”

With Will’s wounds dressed, Hannibal returns to his work. This is how the rest of the weekend passes, as well. The alpha meets the omega for meals and sees to his wounds daily, but spends most of his time in his office, dealing with the crises of his patients.

Will stalks quietly through the house, unsure what to do with himself in the alpha’s absence. At times, he sits himself down with the television remote, or a book plucked from the alpha’s shelves, but finds himself back up and pacing around the manor before long. He hovers in the hallway, between the alpha’s office and his own room, not knowing what he wants.

More and more, the door to the alpha’s office is closed, the alpha’s voice a murmur behind it, tight with stress. Will can’t hear what he’s saying, but he wonders if he’s talking to the couple he’d mentioned earlier; the alpha, and her omega who’d run away. Sometimes he stills, and tries to see if he can make out any details of the alpha’s conversations, but he always finds himself too anxious to listen properly. He hopes, distantly, that the omega is okay.

On one occasion, the alpha’s door shut to take another phone call, Will makes his way down the hall as quietly as he can. He reaches the room at the end, the room where he was made to kneel, and tries the knob. Of course, it is locked, as Will knew it would be. He isn’t sure what he would even want with the room if it weren’t. To survey its walls, perhaps? Make a mental catalogue of every potential punishment he might face? Or just to look at it again, and confirm to himself that it wasn’t imagined?

Monday is welcome when it comes.

The alpha wakes the omega in the morning, for the first time since his punishment on the brick, and Will, mind foggy with sleep, briefly believes he will be going back into work as he had before. The alpha, however, reminds him of their prearranged meeting.

“Jack would like to meet with us at his office in the academy.” Hannibal informs the omega as they descend the stairs.

“In Quantico?”

“The same.”

“What time?” Will asks, trying to calculate the drive in his head.

“9 o’ clock.” Hannibal answers. “It was apparently convenient for Dr. Bloom.”

“What would Alana be doing in Quantico at 9 AM?” Will asks.

“Your guess is as good as mine.”

Breakfast is quiet, as their meals seem to be more and more often. Hannibal has prepared a rich French toast on thick slices of homemade bread, and Will graciously accepts every bite. When breakfast is finished, he is sent upstairs to dress.

It isn’t until Will is fully dressed that he notices it: the empty box on his dresser. His collar has still not been returned. He eyes the space as he buttons up his shirt, swallowing thickly.

He supposes it isn’t an issue. Hannibal had said he was only to wear it when he would be in public without the alpha present, and the alpha was accompanying him today. Still, he wonders what its absence means for his career; surely the alpha wouldn’t allow him back at work without it.

In any case, Will decides, he will not bring it up if the alpha doesn’t. So, he makes his way downstairs.

The drive is long, and longer still from Baltimore’s morning traffic. Will finds himself dozing off more than once before the car lurches to a stop in the parking lot of the FBI academy. He and the alpha unbuckle without a word and make their way inside.

It is strange to be at the academy with no classes to teach. Will has to be redirected by the alpha at one point, his body wanting to follow its known route to his old lecture hall. Twice, he accidentally meets the eyes of former students, who return his gaze with a look of confusion, then pity. He ducks his head, wondering distantly who has taken over his classes.

When they reach Jack's office, he is already seated, with Alana Bloom in front him. The pair's hushed argument grinds to a halt as Will and Hannibal approach, and Jack runs a hand over his face.

"Dr. Lecter, Dr. Bloom, Will Graham." He says, sounding tired. "I believe we all know each other. Please have a seat."

Hannibal takes the seat on the end, closest to the door, and Will takes his own in between Alana and the alpha. He makes a note that he is now "Will Graham," as opposed to "Mr. Graham." A slip of the tongue, he wonders, or another casualty of his omega status?

"Agent Crawford, Dr. Bloom." Hannibal says, by way of a greeting. "Always a pleasure."

"Yes, the same to you, Dr. Lecter." Jack replies. "And Will, of course. Now, what do I have to say to be allowed to get some answers out of Abigail Hobbs?"

Will looks at Hannibal, whose eyes are narrowed at Jack's straightforwardness. He turns his head to eye the beta, who seems equally perturbed.

"I'm not sure, Jack." Alana answers tersely. "What do I have to tell *you* to get you to understand that Abigail Hobbs is not ready for questions?"

"Seven families, Dr. Bloom." Jack responds flatly. "Seven families with no answers regarding the daughters they lost. Abigail Hobbs may be the only one left who knows the truth."

"Even if that is the case, you can't ask her right now." Alana persists. "We have to create a safe place for her first, or you won't get any answers."

"I appreciate your sympathy for her, Dr. Bloom." Jack sighs. "I hope one day you'll appreciate my lack of it."

"Jack," Alana says all at once, voice tight with frustration. "Do you really think Abigail helped her father kill those girls?"

"I think it's a possibility that needs to be ruled out." Jack responds easily. "If Abigail didn't help her father, maybe she knows who did."

Will speaks up then.

"She didn't do it, Jack." He insists. "She had no part in it. Garret Jacob Hobbs killed alone, I know it."

Jack lets out another sigh, running his hand over his face again. He looks tired. Will knows he has been working through the weekend, sacrificing restful nights for anything that could glean answers for seven families of seven dead girls. The rest of the room shifts uncomfortably. Then, Hannibal speaks.

“How was she, when you saw her?” He asks, looking at Alana.

Alana hesitates, bottom lip caught between her teeth, before answering.

“Surprisingly practical.” She says finally.

Jack perks up, interest piqued.

“Suspiciously practical?” he asks.

“I would like to suggest that one can be practical without being a murderer.” Hannibal interrupts.

“Of course.” Alana grants with a tilt of her head. “But I- I don’t know. I think she’s hiding something.”

“Which may simply be part of her trauma.” Hannibal asserts.

“Yeah.” Alana responds flatly. “And it could be more.”

Will is reminded of how the pair spoke to each other on Friday morning: alpha and beta in perfect sync, finishing each other’s sentences. The conversation going on before him seems to be a botched attempt to rekindle such a performance.

“Abigail Hobbs has a penchant for manipulation.” Alana continues. “In the short time we spoke, she withheld information in order to gain information, and demonstrated only enough emotions to prove that she had them at all.”

Jack eyes Hannibal.

“Are you starting to appreciate my lack of sympathy?”

Hannibal ignores Jack, looking across Will at the beta.

“Dr. Bloom,” He says, straightening his back. “You say her behavior may indicate more than trauma, yet you question her involvement in her father’s murders.”

Alana hesitates again, eyes scanning the room for anything to rest on besides the alpha at her side. Finally, she answers.

“What I’m questioning,” she says, meeting Hannibal’s gaze. “Is her state of mind.”

There is a beat of silence. Then, Jack speaks.

“I want Will to talk to her.”

“Jack!” Alana balks. “Not yet! Right, Dr. Lecter?”

All eyes are on Hannibal now, who casts his own gaze downward while adjusting the cuff of his suit. He sighs before speaking.

“It is a delicate situation,” He grants. “But it may be time to introduce a second opinion. Perhaps if I-”

“Go ahead.” Jack says eagerly. “Go with Will. The more, the merrier.”

“Is anyone else worried about overwhelming her?” Alana balks. “The omega who killed her father, and the alpha who stood over her while she bled on the floor? The girl has been awake for less than a week.”

“Dr. Bloom,” Hannibal sighs. “May I suggest that her perceived practicality is not a symptom of a weakened state of mind, but that of a strong one? Perhaps what would help Abigail the most is confronting her trauma at her own pace, which may be faster than you anticipated.”

Alana sits back against her seat, eyes narrow. She taps one finger upon the crook of her folded arms.

“What about *Will’s* pace?”

Hannibal shrugs.

“I don’t suppose I could allow Will to return to work and forbid him from complying with the requests of his boss.” Hannibal answers easily. “That would be talking out of both sides of my mouth, as it were.”

Alana shakes her head.

“It’s still too soon.” She says. “I can’t tell you what to do with your omega, but for my patient, it’s still too soon.”

“Fortunately, Dr. Bloom, I don’t believe we need your permission.” Jack says. “The FBI has already gotten permission from the hospital to interview Abigail about her father’s crimes. If Hannibal allows Will, you can’t stop him.”

Alana’s eyes widen.

“So you’re just going to disregard my opinion right in front of me?” She balks. She turns to look at the alpha to her side. “Hannibal?”

“I hold your opinion in very high esteem, Dr. Bloom.” Hannibal says with a sigh. “But I believe you may have a penchant for coddling your omegan patients. If Abigail seems ready to push past the feelings stage of processing and deal with the practicality of the events that took place, I believe we should let her.”

Alana looks from alpha to alpha, mouth open in disbelief. Will slumps in his seat, feeling the conflict thickly in the air.

“So you’ll allow Will to speak to her?” Jack asks.

“So long as I can present for the conversation.” Hannibal replies.

“You’re making a mistake.” Alana says flatly. “And not just for Abigail.”

“Sorry, Dr. Bloom, but you do not get to decide what is right for Will.” Jack retorts. “Dr. Lecter does.”

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The drive back to Baltimore is faster than the drive away. The morning commuters are now safely at work, leaving the roads clear for Will and Hannibal as they leave Quantico for Port Haven Psychiatric Facility.

Will sits slumped in his seat, looking out the window as they drive along the interstate. The sky is grey, sun covered by the kind of clouds that promise rain but never seem to deliver. A question sits heavy on Will’s tongue from the moment he enters the car. They are nearly back in Baltimore by the time he finds the courage to ask it.

“I thought you didn’t want me to talk to Abigail.” Will says suddenly, looking sideways at the alpha. “What changed?”

Hannibal sighs before answering, clicking on his turn signal as he changes lanes, the pair’s exit approaching.

“As I’ve said before, I hold Dr. Bloom in high esteem.” He says. “But her specialty is in adolescents, not omegan trauma like my own. I find that she- as well as many professionals- tend to over-pathologize the gentler dynamic. There’s a persistent idea that an omega’s strength can never be strength, only weakness in disguise- and I find that it’s most common with those who work with omegas only incidentally, rather than specializing.”

The alpha keeps his gaze on the road as he speaks, but Will watches him unblinkingly, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“In my own practice.” The alpha continues. “I have worked with hundreds of omegas in the wake of tragedies, and I have been astounded at the resiliency of many of my patients. With that in mind, I am inclined to take the girl at her word. If she says she is ready to move on, I will agree.”

Will eyes the alpha.

“But didn’t you tell me my own strength was a bad thing?” He asks with a tilt of the head. “That I needed to learn to be soft?”

The alpha exhales a breathy laugh.

“You need to learn to be *vulnerable* , Will.” He corrects. “But that by no means makes your strength a bad thing. You must learn to strike a balance, that’s all.”

Will’s eyebrows knit together, confused.

“So, you *want* me to be strong?”

“What I want is for you to heal.” Hannibal says, by way of an answer. “Which will require you to relinquish many of the things you think of as strength. I admire your resiliency, however. I do not need you to make yourself helpless so that I may feel strong in contrast.”

Will shakes his head.

“That makes no sense.”

“Explain, please.”

“Well, you punished me for saving Abigail.” Will points out. “But wasn’t that me being strong?”

Hannibal snorts.

“That was you being reckless and defiant.” He responds flatly. “And you know as well as I do that your punishment was for evading authority and endangering yourself- not saving Abigail.”

“Then, you’re glad I saved Abigail?”

“I am relieved that both of you are safe.” Hannibal replies. “And I am unsatisfied with your choices and sense of self-preservation.”

Will grins, despite himself.

“That doesn’t exactly sound like a ‘no.’” He points out.

“Will, I think the state of your knees encapsulates my feelings on your actions at John Hopkins Hospital quite concisely.” The alpha says flatly, and Will ducks his head, heat rising to his face.

They’re in the parking lot of Port Haven now, the alpha pulling the car into one of the many empty spaces marked “visitor.” The alpha leads the omega through the parking lot and into the lobby, without a word from either.

The lobby of Port Havens Psychiatric Facility is deceptively nice, as these things tend to be. The waiting area is spacious, with a television hung in each corner. The TVs are muted, with the dark blocks of closed captions covering the lower half of their screen. In the center of the lobby is a zen fountain, which spills into a koi pond that is set into the sleek, tile floor.

The room is nearly empty, save for a young-looking omega and a middle-aged beta who Will assumes is his guardian, sitting near the fountain. The boy sits with his arms crossed over his torso- the left one is wrapped in bandages. He slumps further in his seat when Hannibal and Will pass, and turns his head to mutter something to the beta.

This quiet murmuring is the only sound in the room, save for the babbling of the fountain. Will thinks this kind of silence, or, rather, the manufactured white noise, would be enough to drive him insane. He thinks, distantly, of Abigail, and hopes she hasn't felt the same way during her stay.

Hannibal makes his way to the desk with Will behind him, and rings the bell placed on its top. A few moments later, a small beta woman comes out of a door behind the desk, marked "employees only." She's dressed in black scrubs, and her name tag reads "Karina." She smiles brightly at the pair.

"How can I help you two?" She chirps, waking the computer in front of her with a move of its mouse. Her nails are manicured to sharp points, painted a dark crimson.

"We are here to visit Abigail Hobbs." Hannibal answers. "Is she available?"

The woman frowns.

"And are you family?"

"FBI." Will answers, with a flash of his badge. "Special Agent Will Graham, and this is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a consulting psychiatrist on the case. My supervisor said we've got the go ahead to question Ms. Hobbs about the crimes of her father."

Karina's eyes widen, and she exhales a nervous laugh.

"Ah, yes. *That* Abigail Hobbs." She mutters.

She types something into her computer, squinting at the screen.

"She's with the adolescents, and I believe they are in group right now. I could call the attending technician and see if they can pull her, though."

"Please." Hannibal responds simply.

The beta picks up the phone on the desk, punching a few numbers into the dialpad with her manicured fingers.

"Hey, Mark!" She chirps. "I'm wondering if you could pull Ms. Hobbs from group. We've got a couple people from the FBI who have some questions for her."

The beta is silent for a few moments, listening to whatever is being said on the other line.

"Well, that's perfect, then." She responds with a shrug. "I'll let the staff on unit know they're coming and send 'em right up. Thanks, Mark."

With this, the beta places the phone back in its cradle, hand still perched on its back, and turns to the pair in front of her.

“Abigail’s in her room.” She says. “And the unit’s empty for group, so I can take you two up there once I talk to the staff on the unit.”

Then, she retakes the phone, and punches another set of numbers into its receiver.

“Hey there, it’s Karina with the front desk.” She says brightly. “Is Abigail Hobbs available for visitors? I’ve got a couple of boys here who say they’re with the FBI, want to ask some questions about her father.”

The beta taps her nails against the desk as she listens.

“I see.” She says. “Well, I’m inclined to believe that the FBI takes precedence.”

The beta goes quiet again, listening. Will looks at Hannibal, who is focused straight ahead, eyes narrow.

“Alright.” The beta says. “Well, I’m taking them up now, so tell them to wrap it up.”

With this, the beta hangs the phone up properly. She makes her way around the desk with a grin.

“Right this way, gentlemen.”

Will and Hannibal follow as the beta leads them to a heavy pair of metal doors. She scans her lanyard on the sensor beside them, and an alarm sounds. The doors swing open on their own.

“I would like to ask you a question, if I may.” Hannibal says, leaning forward to address the beta as the three of them pass through the doorway. “You said Abigail was in her room, while the rest of the unit was in group therapy. Has Ms. Hobbs not left her room all day?”

Karina snorts.

“Ms. Hobbs has not left her room at *all* .” She says. “She went into the day room for twenty minutes on her first day, then went into her room and never came out again.”

“I thought group participation was compulsory on the adolescent ward.” Hannibal replies.

“It is,” Karina responds. “In theory. If they really don’t want to, it’s not like we can drag them out. They just lose points.”

“Points?” Will asks.

“Like a point system.” she replies. “For behavior.”

Karina has led the pair through a winding set of hallways to an elevator, which she summons with a similar swipe of her lanyard. The elevator doors open, and all three step inside.

“The points earn them privileges.” The beta continues, punching the button for the fourth floor. “Stuff like movie night, a later bedtime, you know. If they don’t care about that stuff, they can pretty much do whatever they want.”

“She really hasn’t left?” Hannibal asks. “Not even for meals?”

“We’ve been bringing her meals to the unit.” Karina replies. “We’re really not supposed to, but Abigail’s a special case.”

“To her room, even?” Hannibal balks.

“Yes,” Karina replies. “And we’re *really* not supposed to. Rats, you know. But if we didn’t, she probably wouldn’t eat. And it *is* a special case. I mean, I can’t imagine.”

The elevator has opened onto an identical set of winding hallways, and the beta leads them around the corner to another set of doors, this time wooden. She scans her lanyard a final time, and pulls one door open by its handle.

“She’s got the only single room.” Karina informs as alpha and omega enter the ward. “It’s at the end of the hall, on the right.”

With that, the beta lets the door fall closed, leaving the pair alone in the unit.

Will and Hannibal make their way through the ward. With the majority of patients elsewhere, the lights are turned off, save for the nurse’s station, wherein a few betas in scrubs type at computers without a word, and the light that streams into the hallway from the room at the very end: Abigail’s room.

It is eerie to be in an empty ward like this. Will has been to mental hospitals before, to question victims or suspects, but he has never been unsettled by them the way he is now. Sunlight streaks across the round, metal table of the dayroom- screwed into the floor for patients’ safety- and Will shudders.

Before, the dayrooms he’d visited were lively with the hushed conversation of bored, tired patients. The TV, never off, droned in the background. Patients busied themselves with puzzles, card games, books. Without those things, the place seems empty, dead.

“You are not a fan of hospitals?” Hannibal asks, noticing how the omega lingers in the dayroom, peering anxiously around.

“I’m not usually *not* a fan.” Will answers. “There’s something about seeing it empty. It’s so… sterile.”

“Sterility is a good thing, when it comes to hospitals.”

Will shakes his head.

“I think it would drive me crazy, to be a patient of a place like this.”

“You would have to have been driven crazy already.” Hannibal grins. “In order to become a patient of a place like this.”

Will exhales a laugh, breathy and nervous.

“Drive me crazi *er* .” He corrects. “I don’t blame Abigail, I’d hide in my room, too.”

Hannibal sighs.

“Abigail’s reluctance to participate may have to do more with the ward she was placed on.” Hannibal says. “She is an omega under the age of 21, so they placed her with the adolescents. The other patients are likely much younger, they could be as young as thirteen.”

Will snorts.

“Yeah, at eighteen I wouldn’t have been thrilled at being asked to behave in exchange for ‘points,’ either.” He says. “It’s so grade school.”

“Unfortunately, the same is done on the adult omegan ward.” Hannibal responds.

“But not for alphas or betas?” Will balks. Hannibal grimaces.

“I am not in agreement with *all* of Port Haven’s methods.” He says. “Come, let’s not keep Abigail waiting.”

The pair make their way down the dim hallway. As they approach, they can hear talking: the smoky voice of a female alpha. Will grinds to a halt outside of Abigail’s room, the door open just a crack, and looks to the alpha.

“Someone’s in there already?” He asks.

“Yes.” Hannibal responds. “I believe that was who Miss Karina was referring to when she asked they be told to ‘wrap it up.’”

“So, what do we do?” Will asks. “Do we go in? Do we wait?”

“According to staff, FBI takes precedence.” Hannibal responds easily. “I’m afraid whoever is meeting with Abigail, they will have to cut things short.”

With this, Hannibal pushes through the door, and Will follows behind him, eyes cast anxiously to the floor.

A tall, thin alpha is perched on the edge of Abigail’s bed when the pair enter. She sits sideways, high heels hanging off, as she speaks to the girl. Her hair is a striking mess of tight, red curls, and Will can’t place it, but something about her seems familiar about her.

“A man named Will Graham.” She is saying. With this, she casts a haughty gaze over to the alpha and omega as they enter the room, lip curled upward to reveal a sharp, alphan canine.

“Works for the FBI but isn’t FBI.” She continues. “He captures insane men because he can think like them.”

Now, she looks back to Abigail, to finish her sentence.

“Because he is insane.”

Will rolls his shoulders backward and clears his throat. Behind him, He can feel Hannibal straighten, looming over him, the musk of his anger beginning to fill the room.

“Special agent Will Graham.” Will says flatly, eyes narrow. “Would you excuse us, please?”

Freddie gives a hollow laugh, unimpressed, and rolls her head to address Abigail again.

“By ‘special agent’, he means ‘not an agent.’” She explains, tone snide. “He couldn’t submit himself to the screening process, because then they would have found out about his little pill habit. Isn’t that right, Mr. Graham?”

Will stammers once, then twice.

“They were suppressants.” He says, lamely, and Freddie grins at the easy victory. Behind Will, Hannibal exhales a sigh..

Then, Abigail snorts, taking the entire room by surprise.

“Don’t you think it’s a little disingenuous to call suppressants a ‘pill habit?” She scoffs.

It is Freddie’s turn to stammer.

“Mr. Graham is an unstable individual, *Abigail* .” She says, managing to recover smoothly. “His delicate mental state is exploited by the FBI in order to catch similarly disturbed individuals. But it takes a toll. He collapsed on the scene the day your father died- suppressant resistance. It’s tragic, really.”

Abigail eyes the alpha on her bed, then the pair in front of her. She hunches her shoulders, and slumps in her bed, saying nothing.

“Miss Lounds,” Hannibal says. His voice is low, nearing a growl, but not quite. “I must insist you leave the room.”

Freddie shrugs, and holds her hand out to Abigail, a business card perched between her front two fingers.

“If you want to talk.” She whispers. Abigail takes it.

With this, Freddie climbs gracefully from Abigail's bed, and makes her way out of the girl’s room. She pauses at Hannibal’s side before she leaves, however.

“Dr. Lecter.” She smiles. “Always a pleasure.”

Then, she drops her voice to a whisper; a stage whisper, which the entire room is meant to hear.

“If I were you, I’d lay my claim on that one sooner than later.” She says, grinning viciously. “He’s pretty enough, but that defiant streak can’t be trained out. It’s the kind of thing you’ve got to breed out of them.”

Hannibal snorts, meeting the woman's visciousness.

“You are the last person I would come to for advice on rearing an omega, Ms. Lounds.” He retorts, venom in his voice. “Weren’t you in my office last week asking why your courtships keep ending prematurely?”

Freddie’s eyes narrow, and she and Hannibal stand that way for a moment, locked in a stalemate. Then, with a huff, Freddie walks out the room, high heels clicking on the tile. Hannibal shuts the door behind her.

Will turns his attention to Abigail, who is eyeing the pair suspiciously from her bed. She keeps her head ducked, chin pointed down towards her sheets, but her eyes, wide, round, and ice blue, peel upward. They dart from the alpha to the omega, watching every move the pair make.

“Abigail,” Will says softly. His posture is crouched, shoulders hunched as he tries to make himself look smaller, less intimidating to the girl. “I’m Will Graham, and this is Dr. Lecter. Do you remember us?”

A beat of silence passes, Abigail avoiding either of the men’s gaze. Then, she speaks, lifting her chin and meeting Will’s gaze directly.

"I remember you.” She says quietly. “You killed my dad.”

Will falters, unsure how to respond. Flustered, he straightens and takes an involuntary step backward. He looks to the alpha.

“You have been in bed for days, Abigail.” Hannibal says softly, dutifully relieving the omega of the conversation. “Why don’t we have a walk?”

The grounds of Port Havens Psychiatric Facility are reminiscent of its lobby. In every corner stands another feature for the enrichment of its patients; a lake with a large pier leading out onto the water, an immaculately kept garden that was somehow still blooming in the early winter, a large playground for the children, a courtyard with a beautiful, wooden gazebo at its center. Everything seems to have been designed with aesthetic in mind, even the playground looks sleek and modern; and all of it, all of it, seems to be permeated with the same manufactured near-silence as the lobby. Will wonders if they have planted white noise machines.

The trio make their way through the garden. The walk is quiet. Will keeps his mouth closed, unsure how to recover from the girl's blunt recollection in the ward. Hannibal, on the other hand, makes attempts to engage the girl in conversation, which she deftly avoids.

"You met with Dr. Bloom on Friday?" He asks.

"Yep." is the flat response.

"What was your impression?"

The girl shrugs.

"She's fine."

"How have you found the facility?"

The girl exhales an anxious, stuttering laugh.

"Awful." She says.

The group are approaching a greenhouse, Abigail leading them. She steps up to the door and tries its handle. When it bends, she grins, seeming relieved. She turns to the pair behind her.

"I don't wanna talk about that stuff." She says flatly. "The hospital, Dr. Bloom. That's not my life."

Hannibal and Will exchange looks.

"We don't have to discuss anything you don't want to." Hannibal says gently.

Abigail opens the greenhouse, stepping into it backwards.

"I want to talk about what happened." She says. "When my dad died."

"You don't remember?" Will asks. Abigail gives a bitter laugh.

"I can't stop remembering." She says. "And at the same time, none of it makes sense. It's like the memories are writing over each other, like recording over a tape. When I try to put it in order, it just plays back at random. I remember all of it, but I have no idea what happened."

Will looks to Hannibal, who returns with a nod.

"Your dad was wanted for the murder of eight girls." Will begins.

"No, don't start there." Abigail interrupts. "I wasn't there for that part. Start on the day. How did you find him?"

Will inhales.

"One of our investigators found something in the clothes of one of his victims." He says. "It was a tiny piece of metal: a shred from a pipe threader."

Abigail narrows her eyes.

“You found out he worked in construction, and you figured it out from there?”

“It was a certain kind of metal, from a certain kind of pipe.” Will explains. “We decided to check all the construction sites in Minnesota that used that type of pipe. And the truth is, we got lucky. It was the first site we checked. Your dad had left a resignation letter with a phone number, but no address. All the others had an address. I guess I just knew that-”

“He had something to hide.” Abigail finishes.

She looks at Will, light eyes narrow and pensive. Will swallows and nods.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t save your mother.” He says after a moment. “We did everything we could, but she was already gone.”

Abigail exhales something between a laugh and a sob, turning her head to look away from the omega in front of her.

“I know.” She says. “I saw him kill her.”

Shakily, she takes a seat on an iron bench in the greenhouse, lush plant life surrounding her.

“He was loving right up until the second he wasn’t.” She continues, voice heavy with tears. “Kept telling me he was sorry, to just hold still. He was gonna make it all go away.”

“There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail,” Will says urgently. “But there’s nothing wrong with you. You say he was loving, I believe it. That’s what *you* brought out in him.”

“It’s not all I brought out in him.” She responds flatly. Then, she looks up at the omega, a sudden urgency in her voice.

“I’m gonna be messed up,” She says. “Aren’t I? I- I’m worried about nightmares.”

“We will help you with the nightmares.” Hannibal interjects.

Will draws in a breath, and takes a seat next to the girl.

“There’s no such thing as getting used to what you experienced.” He tells her, honestly. “The truth is, it bothers me a lot. I worry about nightmares too.”

Abigail looks at Will, eyebrows knit together.

“So killing somebody,” she says. “Even if you have to do it, it feels that bad?”

Will grimaces, exhales a shaky breath.

“It’s the ugliest thing in the world.” He answers.

Abigail drops her gaze.

“I want to go home.”

*

With Abigail tucked back into her room, alpha and omega make their way out of the hospital. The air around them is tense, anxious. Neither speak.

As they near the alpha’s car, Freddie Lounds steps in front of them. Hannibal growls, low and harsh: a warning. She ignores this.

“Special agent Graham.” Freddie says brightly, extending a hand for the omega to shake. “I never formally introduced myself. I’m Freddie Lounds.”

Will snorts, ignoring the alpha’s hand.

“Are you trying to salvage this joke from the mouth of madness?”

Freddie presses on, unperturbed.

“Please.” She says, her tone flamboyantly compassionate. “Let me apologize for my behavior in there. It was sloppy and misguided – and hurtful.”

Hannibal steps forward, so that he is next to the omega.

“Ms. Lounds,” He warns. “Now is not the time.”

“Look,” She says flatly, switching tactics. “You and I may have our own reasons for being here, but I also think we both genuinely care about what happens to Abigail Hobbs.”

“You mean the girl you told I was insane?” Will snarks.

“I can undo that.” Freddie replies easily, giving a smile. Her canines shine, sharp and white, in the sun.

Will snorts.

“So, you help Abigail see me as more than her father’s killer,” Will says slowly. “And I help you with online ad sales?”

Beside the omega, Hannibal snickers. Freddie’s expression sours.

“I can undo what I said.” She says flatly. “I can also make it a lot worse.”

Will steps forward, straightening his back, so that he is eye-to-eye with the alpha.

“Ms. Lounds, I think we’re all aware that you will go to great lengths to provoke a story.” He says flatly. “But perhaps you should consider that it’s not very smart to piss off a guy who

thinks about killing people for a living."

At this, Freddie grins.

"Thank you for your contribution, Mr. Graham." She says, a faux-sweetness to her voice.

With that, she leaves the pair in the parking lot, high heels clicking as she walks away. Will releases a growl as she makes her way out of sight.

"Easy." Hannibal says flatly, pulling open the driver's side door. "Our day is far from over."

Will follows suit, pulling open the passenger's side door.

"'Thank you for your contribution.'" He mutters, mockingly, as he climbs in the car. "What did she mean by that?"

"That she is going to feature your quote in an article." Hannibal responds simply, turning the ignition. "Likely in the most unflattering way she can."

Will slumps in his seat.

"Well, what was I supposed to say?" He asks. "She was looking for a fight."

"Nothing was an option." Hannibal responds, looking over his shoulder as he pulls the car out of its space. "After all, I said nothing, and I don't believe she'll be writing an article about me."

"But, if I don't say anything, then she wins." Will persists. "Then she thinks I'm scared of her."

Hannibal snorts.

"How does that saying go?" He asks, rhetorically, with a tilt of his head. "'Better to have the world think you a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt?'"

Will shoots him a look.

"You don't get it." He says. "She would never go after you like that because you're an alpha. She thinks I'm an easy target, so I have to prove her wrong."

Hannibal snorts again.

"Ah, was that what you were doing?" He asks. "Proving her wrong by providing the ideal quote to undermine your own sanity? It is an interesting method."

At this, Will deflates.

"How bad do you think it is?" he asks.

Hannibal sighs.

“No worse than the article she’s already written.” He says flatly. “And, you’re right. She targets you because you’re an omega. She does the same to Abigail.”

This piques Will’s interest.

“She does the same to Abigail?”

“Yes.” Hannibal responds. “She strings both of you along, offering praise only to undermine your dynamic in the next sentence. She wants you to be on pins and needles for her, eager to stay on her good side, which she revokes at her own discretion. It is a chauvinistic attitude.”

“So that’s why she started out playing nice?” Will asks. “When she met us in the parking lot? She thought she could manipulate me if she got me to think we were on the same side.”

“Exactly.” Hannibal answers. “And when Abigail undermined her assessment of your suppressant abuse, she quickly refocused the conversation to call back into question your state of mind. That’s the game: always keep the target moving, so that the victim can never see the one behind it long enough to understand their actual intentions. It is textbook manipulation.”

“So, if that’s the game, how do you win?” Will asks.

“You refuse to play.” Hannibal says simply. “Keep your focus, don’t engage with her distractions, and *say* as little as possible.”

“Would’ve been nice to know going in.” Will mutters.

“Unfortunately, I did not anticipate running into Ms. Lounds today.” Hannibal says. “On the bright side, you’ll have plenty of opportunities to practice in the future. She will not be leaving you alone any time soon.”

Will says nothing, eyeing the alpha in silence. Then, he sits back in his seat, watching as the alpha changes lanes, pulling onto the on-ramp.

“You’re getting back on the interstate?”

“Back to Jack’s, I’m afraid.” Hannibal answers.

“Just what I wanted.” Will deadpans. “To spend half of the day in a car.”

Hannibal snorts.

“You did it three times a week, before.” He responds. “Surely it’s better to get to ride rather than having to drive, yes?”

“No.” Will says flatly. “I enjoyed the drive, and the alone time.”

“I suppose your new life is lacking in alone time.”

“To put it lightly.”

Hannibal sighs.

“Your previous life was *too* rife with alone time.” He says. “It is better to be around people, to not feel alone.”

“Oh, don’t worry.” Will snarks brightly. “I can still feel plenty alone around people.”

Hannibal laughs aloud at that. Then, both are quiet for a beat.

“You have a tendency to isolate.” Hannibal says softly, after a moment.

It is not a question.

“You say it like it’s a bad thing.” Will retorts, but the humor he intended is lost when the words come out of his mouth.

“Because it is.”

Will shrugs, fidgeting in his seat. The car is starting to feel cramped, uncomfortable.

“There’s no point in getting other people involved with it.” He mutters. “They can’t help, anyway.”

“What do you mean by ‘it,’ Will?” Hannibal asks softly.

Will shrugs again.

“My life?” He says, guessing. “My problems?”

“And why do you think that no one can help you with your problems?”

Will inhales, then lets out a stuttering breath.

“I don’t want to do therapy right now.” He says flatly.

“I’m not your therapist, Will.” Hannibal says. “It’s simply a conversation between friends.”

“‘Friends.’” Will repeats. “That’s not what we are, either.”

“Something more, now.” Hannibal agrees.

“You’re not my mate.” Will says sharply. “Not yet.”

Hannibal glances over at the omega, smiling warmly.

“Not yet.” He agrees.

“Then, it’s the same question.” Will presses. “What are we?”

“Legally, I am your guardian.”

“Gross.”

Hannibal snorts.

“I would describe us as ‘family’” He says finally.

Will grimaces, tilting his head to the side.

“Too familiar.” He snarks. “Let’s try ‘cohabitants.’”

“If we are roommates, then you could clean your own dishes from time to time.” Hannibal retorts, shooting the omega a grin.

“If we’re roommates, I get to eat across from you at the table.” Will counters.

“Then it’s a good thing we aren’t.” Hannibal responds easily, and the car is quiet again.

Will slumps in his seat, looking out the window. The sky has begun to clear, without a drop of rain.

“Your father passed.” Hannibal says after a moment. “When he was gone, you were without a family. Is that right?”

“My dogs were my family.” Will answers. Then, he corrects himself. “ *Are* my family.”

“Seven furry children.” Hannibal grants. “But no family besides?”

Will hesitates.

“Honestly, I don’t know how much my dad counted as family, anyway.” He admits. “He showed up once a year and dropped off twelve month’s worth of suppressants, then he disappeared again. It was always weird between us.”

“He was distant?”

Will hesitates.

“Yes,” He grants. “But I knew why. He was working, he really couldn’t do anything else. We had a lot of debt after my mom died, we were always just barely scraping by. I know he loved me. Hell, he worked himself to death for me.”

“Poverty doesn’t always grant the luxury of affection.” Hannibal agrees.

Will eyes the alpha.

“Alright, well, what about you?” He asks. “All alone in your big house. Do *you* have any family?”

The alpha hesitates, tapping his thumb on the steering wheel. He doesn't answer for a long while, and Will begins to think that he won't. Then, he speaks.

"My parents died when I was very young." He says, finally.

He keeps his gaze straight ahead, and Will eyes him sideways.

"So you lost your family when you were just a kid, then?"

Hannibal hesitates again, swallowing thickly.

" *Ne* ," He says softly. "I had a sister."

Will eyes him.

"Older or younger?" He asks.

"Younger." Hannibal responds. "Her name was Mischa. She passed away a few years after our parents. That was when I lost my family."

The car is quiet again, a heavy air of sadness hanging over them. Will casts his gaze down to his lap.

"I'm sorry." He says, not knowing what else to say.

Hannibal exhales a laugh, smiling warmly.

"Don't be." He says. "It is not often I get to talk about her."

Will watches the alpha from the passenger's seat. Hannibal keeps his gaze straight ahead, posture tense, with both hands on the steering wheel.

"Tell me about her, then." Will says after a moment.

The alpha seems to startle.

"What?" He asks. His eyes peel away from the road for a brief moment, wide enough for Will to see the whites around his dark irises. He seems almost panicked.

"I mean, if you want to." Will amends. "Sorry, maybe that was rude. You said you don't get to talk about her a lot, so I thought-"

"No, no." Hannibal laughs, breathily. "Don't apologize, sweet boy. You took me by surprise, that's all."

The car is quiet for another moment. Then, the alpha begins to speak.

"She was… a joyful child." He says, slowly. "Always upbeat, even in the gravest of circumstances."

There is another beat of silence, and Will almost thinks he should say something. Then, the alpha speaks again.

“She was never scared of anything.” He says, laughing softly as he speaks. “Not storms, not soldiers. She was certain that she was a match for anything that came her way. I had to pull her away from more than one schoolyard brawl. She would challenge *boys* , three years her senior.”

Will laughs at that.

“Good for her.” He says, and Hannibal laughs.

“Yes, well.” The alpha responds. “It is not as good for anyone when the two of you are in the headmaster’s office, trying to come up with an explanation.”

The pair laugh, and then the alpha is quiet. He stares ahead, giving his head a small shake.

“But, she wasn’t a bad child.” He says quickly, as if correcting himself. “She simply hated anything that struck her as unfair, and if no one else would fix it, she was going to see to it herself. She got high marks in school, and she was gentle with her friends.”

“She sounds like a good kid.” Will says softly, and alpha sighs softly in return.

“She was a great kid.” He says. “She used to sing in the mornings, on our way to school. Quietly, like she didn’t want anyone to hear. You know how children get embarrassed. They were songs our mother used to sing to us, when she was putting us to bed. I… I can’t remember how they go.”

The car is silent, then Hannibal clears his throat and speaks again.

“After she died, my aunt and uncle took me in.” He says. His voice is even now, devoid of the light, tight quality it had before. “They raised me to adulthood, then I lived in Florence for a time before I was offered an internship at John Hopkins Hospital. That was when I came to America.”

Will eyes the alpha. The shift in tone, the way the alpha seems to tie the conversation off with a bow; it’s all very deliberate. Will wants to know more; he’d enjoyed hearing about the alpha’s beloved sister. It had made their relationship feel less one-sided, Will finally garnering a peek into the alpha’s psyche for a change. It is over, however, as quickly as it began, and Will knows better than to press the alpha on such a sensitive topic.

The rest of the drive is quiet. The omega tries, once or twice, to rekindle a conversation, but the alpha is quiet, pensive. Will is relieved when they pull up to the academy.

When they arrive at Jack’s office, Alana is once again seated in front of Jack’s desk, arms crossed over chest. Jack rises from his seat and greets the pair with a sarcastic brightness to his voice.

“Dr. Lecter! Will Graham! Just the people I wanted to see.” He grins. “You know, I just read the most fascinating article.

Will winces.

“God damn, she’s fast.” He mutters, and Hannibal snorts behind him.

“‘Reporter Freddie Lounds caught up with wayward omega Will Graham and his alpha guardian in the parking lot of Port Haven’s Psychiatric Facility this afternoon’” Jack reads from his screen, keeping the same faux-brightness in his tone. “When Miss Lounds expressed concerns about Mr. Graham’s mental health under the stressors of working with the FBI, the omega had this to say.”

At this, Jacks voice drops to its usual gruffness as he continues.

“‘It’s not very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.’” Jack finishes.

He eyes Will and Hannibal dangerously as they take their seats. Will ducks his head.

“You know what else isn’t very smart?” Jack asks. He turns to Hannibal. “You were there with him, and you let those words come out of his mouth.”

Hannibal exhales something between a sigh and a laugh.

“I trust Will to speak for himself.” He says simply.

“Evidently, you shouldn’t.” Jack responds flatly.

“I’m just happy the story wasn’t about Abigail Hobbs.” Alana says with a shrug.

“Well, then it’s a victory.” Jack spits. He turns to Hannibal. “Alright, tell me what you know.”

Hannibal falters for a moment.

“She is practical.” He says. “As Dr. Bloom had said. She’s primarily focused on the events of her father’s death. She’s having involuntary recall of the events, and she wants to place them in a timeline. She expressed a desire to return home.”

At this Jack shrugs.

“Abigail Hobbs wants to go home.” He says. “Let’s take her home.”

“What Abigail wants and what she needs are different things.” Alana interjects. “Taking her out of a controlled environment would be reckless.”

“You said she was practical.” Jack counters.

“That could just mean she has a dissociative disorder.” Will points out.

“Don’t take her home.” Alana says flatly. “You take her home, she may experience intense emotions, respond aggressively, or re-enact some aspect of the traumatic event without even realizing it.”

Jack eyes the trio across from him. He turns to Hannibal.

“Where do you weigh in on this, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal sighs.

“Dr. Bloom is right.” He says. “But there is a scenario where revisiting the trauma event could help Abigail heal and actually *prevent* denial.”

“Then we have a difference of opinion.” Jack says brightly. “Therefore, I am going to choose the opinion that best serves my agenda. I need to know if you’re right about the copycat, Will.”

Alana sighs, running a hand through her hair.

“We have no way of knowing what’s waiting for her when she goes home.” She mutters.

“It could be closure.” Hannibal offers.

“It could be retraumatization.” Alana shoots back.

“Well, there’s no way to know until we try.” Jack chirps.

“Do you think this is funny?” Alana balks. “Jack, this is the delicate mind of a girl who lost *everything* . You’re playing with it like it’s a toy.”

“I appreciate the delicacy of the situation.” Jack retorts. “However, I have seven more delicate situations sitting on my desk. Seven families who have not seen a shred of evidence as to where their daughters’ bodies might be. How is *that* for closure?”

The two stare each other down for a moment. Then, Alana drops her head in her hands.

“She is a strong girl.” Hannibal says gently. “I don’t think this will break her, Alana.”

Alana looks up, body still bent over her lap. She sweeps her hair behind her shoulder before she speaks.

“What did you think, Will?” she asks.

Will stammers, caught off guard.

“To be honest with you, I don’t know.” He says honestly. “She- she didn’t seem helpless, or broken. She was smart. She wanted to know what happened. She said her mind just keeps playing it over and over and she just wants to make it make sense. I think going home could help her do that.”

Alana narrows her eyes.

“That sounds like PTSD.” she says.

“I think we are all on the same page, there.” Hannibal replies.

“Research has shown that being made to recount a traumatic event repeatedly after it’s taken place makes patients develop PTSD more reliably.” Alana says. “And more severely.”

“She is not being made to recount anything.” Hannibal replies. “Her mind is doing it all on its own. Maybe if we give her some answers, she’ll be able to put it to rest.”

“I thought Abigail was the one giving answers to us.” Alana counters.

“It’s give and take, I think.” Jack says.

“And what’s our plan if this goes wrong?” Alana asks.

“Abigail Hobbs will have two trauma specialists at her disposal the entire time.” Jack responds easily. “What safer way could there be to reintroduce her to the scene of the crime?”

Alana sighs, defeated.

“When are we planning to leave?”

“Tomorrow.” Jack says flatly. “As early as we can. I’m seeing a flight out of Baltimore at 9 AM. We’ll get a hotel, stay a couple days, so she has time to process.”

“Sure.” Alana mutters bitterly. “Not like anything I say will change your mind, so let’s get this traumatized girl on a plane as soon as possible.”

“Glad to see we’re on the same page.” Jack smiles.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Note:

Hello! Told ya I'd be back :)
Thank you to all my returning readers for your patience. This chapter was delayed for two reasons:

1. National ADHD Med Shortage :(
2. Had an idea for a new story which has taken a lot of brain space an made it hard to focus on anything else.

This other story will have its first few chapters posted on my profile shortly after this goes up. It is original fiction, A/B/O, and similarly dark. It is titled "A Vinter Boy." If you like my writing, I'd be very grateful for you to check it out!

In addition to this, I have made a tumblr for my AO3: @ octopationaltherapy
Here, I will post some updates, some art (I also draw!!), as well as the chapters for my original fiction. I'd be delighted for you to check it out!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Another drive across two state lines has alpha and omega back at their home. The winter sun has long set by the time they pull in the drive.

“Well, that took all day.” Will sighs, stepping out of the car.

"We missed lunch.” Hannibal responds, shutting his own car door. “I’ll prepare a hearty dinner. Then, shall we make our way to bed early? Our flight leaves in the morning.”

“And we have to pack.” Will groans. “How long is it? Jack a few days, does that mean a week?”

“A week is probably a safe frame of mind to have.” Hannibal replies. “Ms. Hobbs may wind up leading us all around the city, showing fragments she can tie back to her father’s crimes.”

“Try the state.” Will retorts. “He took girls from all over the state, off of college campuses.”

The pair are entering the foyer now, where they pause to remove their jackets. Hannibal catches Will by the chin as he turns from the coat rack.

“You look tired.” He says softly.

Will jerks his face away, but he regrets the harshness of the motion once it is done.

“I didn’t get a lot of sleep last night.” He mutters, by way of apology.

“It is a rarity for you,” Hannibal agrees. “A good night’s rest. I’d hoped you were able to recover somewhat over the weekend.”

“Somewhat.” Will affirms. “But you’re right, I can never sleep.”

“Would you like to rest while I make dinner?” Hannibal asks, and Will shakes his head.

“If I lay down now, I won’t want to get up,” he says. “And we’ve still got to pack.”

“You could start packing now.” Hannibal suggests. “Achieve an earlier bedtime.”

“I don’t have a suitcase,” Will points out.

“Come,” Hannibal replies, leading the omega up the stairs. “I have enough luggage for us both.”

The alpha leads the omega up the stairs, and into his own bedroom. Will pauses in the doorway, fidgeting. He is unsure if he is allowed to cross the threshold.

"You may come in, Will," Hannibal assures. "I keep my luggage in my closet, when not in use."

Will steps across the doorway, and is flooded by the alpha's scent. It is smokey, and just slightly, pleasantly tart, almost like wine; and utterly, utterly alphan. Will swallows thickly.

He is surprised how ordinary the alpha's room is. In a lot of ways, it is not unlike his own. Slightly larger, and outfitted in darker, more masculine colors, but much the same in layout. Will peeks at the alpha's bed to find the sheets slightly disheveled, and has to fight a giddy grin off his face. He doesn't know why it scandalizes him so, his own bed is left a mess of linen every morning, but he'd always imagined Hannibal to be pristine in everything he does. The slightest imperfection, as he sees it, is a victory.

"Do you see something that interests you?" Hannibal asks, looking over his shoulder. He is lowering a rolling suitcase from the top shelf of the closet.

Will shrugs.

"Just looking, I guess." He says. "I didn't expect your room to look like this."

The alpha snorts.

"Like what?"

"Like normal." Will replies. "It's almost like mine."

“Well, I did furnish both of them,” the alpha replies dryly. “Come here. Is this a good size?”

Will makes his way over to the alpha, and examines the suitcase on the floor.

“Honestly, a little big.”

“This is the smallest I have, I’m afraid.” Hannibal says. “You tend to pack light?”

“It’s a week’s stay.” Will balks. “Don’t you have a duffel bag? I could probably get away with just a carry-on.”

Hannibal tuts.

“You should plan to bring a few items for your comfort.” He scolds. “Things of your preferred texture, with your scent on them. You’re going to find it more and more difficult to spend the night in strange places as the suppressants leave your system.”

Will snorts.

“Well, I’m afraid I left all my teddy bears in Virginia.” He snarks. Hannibal rolls his eyes.

“A blanket will do nicely.” He retorts. “I put plenty in your room, is there one you use every night?”

“The blankets are on the floor.” Will says flatly. “They’re too hot, they make me sweat. I just wrap myself in the top sheet and call it a night.”

“And you wonder why quality sleep evades you.” Hannibal deadpans. “We’ll bring the top sheet, then. Leave space in the bag, and we’ll pack it before we leave.”

“Yeah, hotels actually *provide* top sheets now.” Will snarks. “A whole set of sheets, in most places. Some even have comforters!”

Hannibal eyes the omega, expression unimpressed.

“Ha ha.” He says flatly. “We’re bringing your sheet. You are already prone to nightmares, I’m not going to have you sleeping in a strange bed without anything that has your scent.”

Will shrugs.

“Fine, I guess.” He says. “But I’ve stayed in a hotel before.”

“Not off of suppressants.” Hannibal responds, handing the omega the suitcase. “And not as my omega. Go pack, I’ll start dinner.”

Will packs quickly; seven shirts, seven pants, seven pairs of under garments, three pairs of pajamas. The suitcase is less than halfway full when he is done. He places his toothbrush on top, then stares at the mostly empty bag for a moment, fidgeting. Finally, he zips it closed, not knowing what else to do.

He pads down the stairs and meets the alpha in the kitchen. The alpha is stood at the island, attending a mound of dough placed on a cutting board in front of him. He doesn’t turn when the omega enters.

“That was fast.” He says flatly.

Will shrugs, making his way around the island.

“It’s a short trip.”

“What did you pack?”

“Clothes. What else?”

“Any grooming products?” The alpha presses. “Soap? Shampoo?”

Will laughs.

“There’s soap and shampoo at the hotel.” He says. “That’s what’s in those little bottles. They’ll even let you take ‘em home!”

Hannibal scoffs.

“Pack the bottles in your bathroom.” He says. “Omegan skin is sensitive. You’ll need the lotion, too.”

Will snorts.

“Is now a good time to tell you I haven’t touched that bottle of lotion once?”

“Better be careful with what you let slip.” Hannibal says sharply. “If I can’t trust you to take care of your body on your own, I’ll be happy to do it for you.”

At this, Will’s mouth goes dry, heat rising to his face.

“What, you’re gonna bathe me like a kid?” He balks.

“Why?” Hannibal retorts. “Do I need to?”

Will’s face burns, he casts his gaze to the floor.

“Go upstairs and finish packing.” Hannibal instructs. “You still have some time before dinner is cooked.”

With a roll of his eyes, Will goes back upstairs. He pads into his bathroom, unsure what he actually needs. Shampoo, the alpha had said, and soap. He might as well take the conditioner, even though most hotels provide that as well. He places them in the suitcase, then fidgets. Hadn’t there been something else?

The lotion, on his dresser; he throws that in there too. He really hasn’t used it, there is still plastic wrapped around the pump, keeping it closed. Then, the face cleanser next, right? Or was that overkill? He only used it on the odd days he didn’t shower, otherwise he just washed his face with the same soap as his body. He shakes his head, and decides to leave it. What else?

Will grabs a safety razor, although his stubble hasn’t seemed to grow at all since he’d stopped suppressants, and his hairbrush from the bathroom counter. He carries them into his room and adds them to the bag. Then, he takes a step back, and surveys his work.

The bag looks considerably fuller, now, though still too empty for its size. Will hesitates. Tomorrow, he’ll add the top sheet, which will fill a respectable amount of space- maybe he’ll take a pillow, too, then? That would probably make up for the rest of the space, and hotels always had flat pillows, anyway.

With that, he makes his way back down the stairs.

When Will reenters the kitchen, Hannibal is at the stove, attending a large, boiling stock pot as well as a smaller sauce pan. The smell of bacon is thick in the air.

“Finish packing?” The alpha asks as the omega approaches. He gives the saucepan a stir.

“Even brought the lotion.” Will snarks, and Hannibal snorts.

“Good boy.” He says. “Dinner is almost ready.”

“What’d you make?”

“Miltiniai ežiukai.” Hannibal says. “Flour dumplings.”

As he speaks, the alpha spoons two portions of dumplings out of the stock pot onto two waiting plates with a slotted spoon. Then, he takes the sauce pan, and pours a thick gravy over both. He takes both plates and makes towards the dining room. Will follows.

“More Lithuanian food?” Will asks.

“Yes,” Hannibal says, as they reach the table. “I’ve served the dumplings in a gravy made from bacon fat, with minced bacon therein. They are topped with chives.”

“It smells good.” Will says, mouth watering as the alpha places the plates on the table.

“Thank you, Will. I hope you enjoy.” Hannibal says warmly, taking his seat. “Kneel, please.”

Will sinks to his knees on his cushion, which has remained in place since his last punishment. He takes the bite Hannibal offers him eagerly, moaning as he bites down. Lithuanian food, he is finding, is very fatty and rich. It is well appreciated after the day he’s had.

“These are a favorite of Lithuanian children.” Hannibal says as he lowers another bite to the omega. “Miltiniai ežiukai actually translates to ‘mealy hedgehogs,’ a reference to the spiked shape of the dumpling.”

Will takes the bite and chews it thoughtfully.

“You’ve been feeling nostalgic today?” He asks.

“Perhaps.”

“Our conversation in the car?” Will asks.

Hannibal hesitates. He lowers the omega another bite.

“Partly.” He admits. “I’m afraid home has been on my mind more and more since your arrival, however. It has been a very long time since I shared a home.”

Will swallows his food with a snort.

“I guess I’ve got you feeling sentimental, roomie?”

Hannibal exhales a soft laugh. There is a beat of silence.

“How are you feeling about tomorrow?” He asks. “Abigail is not the only one revisiting a trauma.”

Will tilts his head from side to side, thinking.

“I haven’t even thought about it, really.” He says. “I’m far more worried about Abigail than myself.”

“I am worried about both of you.” Hannibal responds dryly. “Do you think often of that day? The death of Garret Jacob Hobbs?”

“I try not to.”

“I did not ask what you try to do.” Hannibal responds. “Abigail said she cannot stop remembering, that her brain replays the corrupted tapes again and again. It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that you have repeating recordings of your own, from a slightly different angle.”

Will swallows.

“I don’t think about it much during the day.” He says. “Work is how I’ve always dealt with that kind of stuff- it can’t catch up to me if I stay busy. At night, though…”

He trails off.

“Nightmares, you mean?” Hannibal asks.

“And immediately after waking up from nightmares.” Will snorts. “I dream about it a lot- it’ll be the same thing, play by play, but one detail will be different, and it changes everything at the end. Like, sometimes I’m at the construction site, but Jack is there instead of you. And, because we don’t stop to talk in the car, we get there earlier and are able to save Abigail’s mom.”

The alpha watches the omega with narrow eyes as he speaks. Will turns his face away.

“Or, it’ll be me and you again, but this time Hobbs left an address but no phone number,” Will continues. “and I’m not as sure that it’s meaningful, so I hesitate and look for something

else. Then, we show up too late, and Abigail is dead. When I wake up, I can't stop turning everything over in my mind, looking for something I could have done differently- something I can do differently next time."

"But you never think of your heat?" Hannibal asks, and Will startles.

"I guess I don't." He says.

Hannibal sighs and lowers another dumpling to the omega.

"The nightmares are classic post-traumatic stress." He says. "As is the rumination when you wake up. Your brain is fixated on the event, looking for ways to prevent it from happening again. The more you fixate, the deeper your brain encodes the memory. It is a feedback loop."

"What do I do, then?" Will asks. "How do I not fixate?

"You could come and get me."

Will snorts.

"I'm not about to start crawling into your bed whenever I have a nightmare." He says flatly.

"You would not have to climb into bed with me." Hannibal assures. "We could come downstairs, make a warm drink, and talk until you feel ready to return to bed."

"Then neither of us will get any sleep." Will points out. Hannibal sighs.

“I would happily sacrifice a few hours of sleep if it meant you didn’t have to weather these things alone.” The alpha says softly.

Will grimaces. He drops his gaze, fidgeting on his cushion.

“It would be an excellent opportunity to practice vulnerability.” Hannibal presses.

“Ah, yes.” Will snarks. “Vulnerability. Don’t worry, I’ve been practicing it loads, just not when you’re around.”

Hannibal exhales softly, denying the omega a laugh at his joke.

“I know the idea is uncomfortable, Will.” He says gently. “I am not going to force you to do anything. I ask that you keep the offer in mind, though, and urge you to take it if you ever feel tempted. I promise you I will not be angry with you if you wake me.”

The rest of dinner is quiet, sleepy. The food is filling, warm and thick in the omega’s stomach. It is the kind of meal that leaves one ready for bed, and Will’s eyelids are already drooping when the alpha stands from his place, lifting the plates to clean in the kitchen sink.

“Don’t get into bed, yet.” The alpha instructs over his shoulder. “I need to tend to your knees again. I suppose that will suffice as our training for the night, as well.”

Will waits for the alpha in his bathroom, seated on the lid of the toilet. He has already changed into his night clothes: A t-shirt and a pair of boxers. He is tempted to cover himself with his bathrobe, but finds that he is too exhausted to bother. The alpha has seen him undressed plenty of times, anyway.

Will sighs in relief when the alpha raps on the open doorframe of his bedroom, ready to put an end to the day.

“In here.” He calls in return.

“No bathrobe tonight?” Hannibal asks, making his way into the omega’s bathroom. He stops at the sink and retrieves the first aid kit from the medicine cabinet

“Like you haven’t seen it before.” Will replies through a yawn, and Hannibal exhales a soft laugh in reply.

“It is a good thing,” The alpha says, lowering to his knees. “That you are getting more comfortable here.”

He takes a pair of scissors and cuts through the gauze around the omega’s knee, peeling it away. There is dried blood on the inside of the bandages, but less than before. Every day, the wounds shrink, just slightly; the scabs toughen, and moving hurts less.

“I would like you to tell me about your childhood tonight, if you will.” The alpha says softly. He applies the antibiotic ointment to Will’s knee as he speaks.

Will shrugs, trying to stifle a yawn as it claws its way up his throat.

“Not much to tell.” He says. “We were pretty much just your average white trash.”

“I don’t believe that for a moment, Will.” Hannibal counters. He pulls out a roll of gauze, and begins to wrap the omega’s knee. “You grew up poor, with no mother and a single, alphan father. I expect things were often difficult.”

“Things are often difficult for everybody.” Will scoffs. “He kept a roof over my head, we ate every day. All things considered, I didn’t have much to complain about.”

“You said he was distant, in the car.”

“He was.” Will affirms. “He was an alpha from West Virginia. I’m pretty sure ‘distant’ is the only flavor they come in.”

Hannibal exhales a soft laugh, cutting the bandage from the omega’s other knee.

“Did you feel lonely often?” He asks. “As a child?”

Will fidgets.

“I mean, sometimes.” He says. “I don’t know. Everyone does, though, don’t they?”

“I am not asking about everyone, Will.” Hannibal says as he pulls the bandages from the omega’s other knee. “I am asking about you.”

Will takes in a breath.

“I don’t know what you want me to say.” He says flatly. “My childhood was completely unremarkable.”

Hannibal snorts.

“Let’s move on to adolescence, then.” He says gently, dressing the wound on the omega’s knee with the ointment. “How old were you when you presented?”

Will grimaces, tilting his head to the side.

“Eleven, I think.”

Hannibal looks up at the omega from his spot on the floor, a look of shock on his face.

“Eleven?” He asks.

Will nods, looking away.

“That’s very young.” Hannibal says. “You had your first heat at eleven years old?”

Will swallows. He says nothing.

“Tell me how you handled it.” Hannibal presses as he wraps the omega’s remaining knee in gauze. “And your father. Tell me how you got through it.”

Will exhales a laugh, stuttering and nervous.

“I hadn’t even had ‘the talk,’ yet.” He admits. “I thought I was sick- that I was dying honestly. I didn’t, um, ‘help myself’ during it, you know. I mean, I had never heard of any of that kind of stuff. I stayed in bed the whole week, and then my dad gave me two little white pills when it was over. I didn’t even learn I was an omega for another two years.”

“You began taking suppressants at eleven years old?” Hannibal balks.

Will nods.

“Did your father at least stop them for heats?” He asks. “An omega should have at least one heat every two years, for reference.”

Will laughs aloud at that.

“No.” He says flatly. “I think both of us were relieved to not have to wash the sheets.”

Hannibal rises, having finished dressing the omega’s wounds, a look of disbelief etched into his face.

“It is a miracle that suppressant resistance did not take root until you were 28, Will.” He says. “That is flagrant abuse of the medication.”

Will laughs, offering only a shrug in response. The alpha sighs.

“You learned you were an omega two years later.” He says. “Tell me about that.”

Will snorts.

“It was, what, eighth grade?” He says. “All my friends were starting to present. This one girl was out for a week because she had her first rut- and I was telling him about it because I hadn’t known that girls could be alphas. I asked him if he thought I would be an alpha like him, and he looked at me like I had two heads. He said ‘you’re already an omega, Will.’ He thought I already knew.”

Hannibal’s brow seems to furrow deeper with every word the omega says.

“Distant, indeed.” He murmurs. “You and your father did not have these sorts of discussions openly, then?”

Will snorts.

“He was an alpha from West Virginia.” He says again.

“Being an alpha is not an excuse to deny connection to your pup.” Hannibal counters. “Especially to an omega. Your father should have shown you affection regularly.”

Will scoffs.

“Neither of us were interested in that.” He says.

“Were there any interests you shared, then?” Hannibal asks.

“Plenty.” Will responds. “Fishing, construction. He taught me how to work on diesel engines, taught me to hang drywall. We moved around a lot, because of his job. He worked in shipyards, or construction if he couldn’t find it. In the summers, I’d come with him to work sometimes, help out; it was another pair of hands, so we’d get to take home some extra money. Then we’d eat a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and watch the news in silence.”

“He raised you like an alpha, then?’ Hannibal says, and Will raises a brow.

“None of that is exclusive to alphas.” He says, meeting Hannibal’s gaze with a glare.

“Of course not.” Hannibal allows. “But from a standpoint of societal expectations-”

“I suppose you would have had him keep me at home and teach me to sew, instead.” Will interrupts, combative. “Enroll me in ballet, or something?”

“Ballet may have done you some good.” Hannibal counters with a snort. “You never had a chance to be around omegan peers, after all. It has left you with a very skewed idea of all three of the dynamics.”

“I think I have a fine idea of the dynamics.” Will argues. “You’re the one who seems to think of omegas as incompetent.”

Hannibal snorts.

“I have no doubts about your competency, Will.” He retorts “Needing support and affection doesn’t make one incompetent- it is the denial of that fact that does it.”

Will scoffs.

“I don’t need those things any more than you do.”

“Alphas need support and connection as much as omegas, Will.” Hannibal sighs. “The difference is in the form that it takes.”

Will laughs, mocking and vicious.

“Yeah, alphas need support in the form of a clean house and dinner on the table.” He snarks. “And omegas need support in the form of being held down and knotted. Is that right? You are the expert, after all.”

Hannibal scoffs, meeting the omega’s venom.

“Yes, Will, it’s so often that you clean this house and cook dinner, isn’t it?”

Will rolls his eyes.

“You know what I mean.” He says. “Alphas do whatever they want, and betas can, too, as long as they don’t step on the alpha’s toes. Omegas have to be satisfied with their place at the

bottom, taking orders from everyone else. It's bullshit."

Hannibal snorts.

"Such unfair expectations I enforce on you." He coos, faux-pity in his voice. "Such as 'come home on time,' and 'do not lie to me.' Your life is so unfair, Will, how do you manage?"

"I'm 28 years old." Will counters. "I should be able to come home whenever I want, and I shouldn't have to answer to you or anyone else."

"Do you need to be reminded of how you lived without anyone to answer to, Will?" Hannibal asks. "It was not well."

"However I lived, it was my business." Will spits.

"Well, it is my business now." Hannibal retorts. "Let's put this conversation to bed before you end up over my knee, shall we?"

"Spoken like someone who knows they're losing." Will challenges. "You can do whatever you like, we both know you're stronger than me. Doesn't make me any less right, though, does it?"

The alpha eyes the omega. A smug grin crosses his face.

"Will, if I didn't know any better, I'd say a spanking was exactly what you were after." He says, a playful lilt to his voice. "If that is the case, you need only ask. I would be happy to oblige."

Will balks, color rising to his face. He turns his entire body away, drawing into himself to seek refuge from the alpha.

“Don't flatter yourself.” He spits. Hannibal sighs.

“Enough, Will.” He says. His tone is different now, gentle. “You are going to have to contend with the fact that there are certain things you simply don’t understand. You must trust that I have your best interest in mind.”

“I understand plenty.” Will mutters.

Even as the omega argues, he remains seated sideways on the lid of the toilet, curled into himself and avoiding the alpha’s gaze. Hannibal watches him for a moment, then exhales a laugh, warm and fond.

“It is so difficult for you to let these things go.” He says softly. “Isn’t it?”

Will only emits a soft growl in response.

“You said it earlier, didn’t you?” Hannibal continues. “About Ms. Lounds. If you say nothing then she wins, you said. If you say nothing, she believes you’re scared. It is the same with me, isn’t it?”

Will still doesn’t answer.

“I don’t want you to be scared of me, Will.” The alpha says gently.

Will snorts.

“Could’ve fooled me.” He spits. “Forcing someone to kneel on rough–face brick is not a great way to keep them on your good side, after all.”

Hannibal sighs.

“And yet we were friends again in the morning.” He says. “Perhaps you knew it was earned?”

“Perhaps I knew that you can do whatever you want, anyway.” Will spits.

“That must be scary.” Hannibal says softly. “To feel at the complete disposal of another.”

Will exhales, breathy and nervous.

“I don’t want to do therapy.” He says. “We were supposed to be arguing.”

Hannibal laughs outright.

“Yes, that seems to be far more comfortable for you, doesn’t it?” He retorts, and Will laughs, despite himself.

“I don’t think I’m ever going to get over it honestly.” He says. “We should probably get used to arguing.”

“Don’t worry, sweet boy. I anticipated plenty of arguing.” Hannibal says fondly. “You don’t realize, however, that you are adjusting. Quickly, even.”

“I don’t want to adjust.” Will says flatly.

“I am sure you don’t want to.” The alpha agrees. “And I am sure that it is better that you do.”

Will exhales, fidgeting in his seat, and Hannibal sighs.

“Let’s put this conversation to bed.” He says, returning the first aid kit to the cabinet. “Tomorrow is going to be taxing, you will need rest.”

–

Will awakes with a start, the alpha standing over his bed.

“Time to wake up, I’m afraid.” The alpha says, one hand on the omega’s shoulder.

It is still dark outside of Will’s bedroom windows. He reaches for his alarm clock without sitting up:

6:28 AM

"I thought our flight didn’t leave until 9.” Will says, exhaling loudly. He drops the clock back onto his nightstand

“We have an errand to run beforehand.” Hannibal says. “As well as breakfast to eat. Come.”

Breakfast is bagels with smoked salmon and cream cheese, eaten in silence. The bagel is the best the omega has ever tasted, though his experience had been limited to those from the grocery store. It is warm, chewy; it tastes fresh. He wonders if the alpha had made them by hand. He wonders how long the alpha had been awake.

When breakfast is over, the pair ascend the stairs to dress. Will is buttoning his shirt when Hannibal raps on the door.

“What?” the omega asks as he pulls the door open. His top two buttons remain undone.

“Have you finished packing?” The alpha asks. “I will bring your suitcase to the car.”

“I can take it.” Will counters.

“Of course you can.” Hannibal replies warmly. “And I would like to do it for you, if you’ll allow me. Did you pack your sheet?”

“Hold on.” Will says.

He makes his way to his bed, a disheveled mess of linen, and pulls his top sheet from its place atop the tangle of plush blankets on the floor. He rolls it into a kind of cylinder, unable to be bothered to fold it properly. Then, he unzips the case and puts it on top. He frowns at the unfilled space. Hadn’t there been something else?

Yes: his pillow. The alpha had provided him with an excess of pillows, most of which found their place on the floor with the blankets by the end of his second night. One, however, had earned the privilege to remain on the bed, the perfect amount of firm and soft. He takes it from its place and adds it to his luggage, then zips it closed. He looks at the alpha, expectant.

“A pillow as well?” Hannibal asks, giving a tilt of his head.

“Is that an issue?”

The alpha exhales a laugh.

“Not at all. It is wise for an omega to bring comfort items on a trip.” He responds. “I’m simply surprised you would take such advice to heart.”

The alpha carries the omega's suitcase to the car and places it in the trunk, atop his own. Then, the two take their seats.

"So what errand are we running?" Will asks as he pulls his seatbelt across his chest.

"We must retrieve your collar." Hannibal answers. "I dropped it off to be altered on Thursday."

"And here I thought I saw the last of that thing." Will snarks. "Altered how?"

"Some basic safety features." Hannibal answers, noncommittal. "I will explain more when we have it in hand."

Will eyes the alpha, but doesn't protest, and Hannibal pulls the car out of the drive.

The sun is rising when they reach their destination: a jewelry store, its name ordained in a sign above its large, glass entrance. It is the same logo printed on the box of Will's collar in a fine script, and Will still cannot make out what it actually says. The first letter is a stylized A, followed by a t, or maybe an r? The script is flamboyantly stylized, looping over itself again and again before swooping below to underline itself. Will wrinkles his nose.

The store is classy, in an old-fashioned way. The walls are lined with jewelry of all kinds: traditional things like necklaces, rings and bracelets which glisten with diamonds under the fluorescent light, and less traditional things such as cuffs and even gags.

Throughout the floor, square displays stand in the center of round, locked cases. The display heads stand in the center case, collars in all styles wrapped around their featureless, cloth-covered throats. On either side stand two display hands, rising from the base of their forearms to frame the blank face between them. On each wrist is a cuff, matching the collar set between them in color and style.

Will hunches his shoulders as he follows the alpha to the help counter. He feels out of place, as he always does when surrounded by expensive things. Behind the display case, attending a cash register, is a beta with a shaved head and rectangular glasses. The cash register drawer is open, the clerk counting its till, but when the pair approach he replaces the cash and slides it closed. He greets them with a smile.

“How can I help you gentlemen?” He asks. “Are we looking for anything in particular?”

“I’m here to pick up an alteration.” Hannibal replies. “It was left Thursday evening, under the name ‘Lecter.’”

“Ah yes, I believe it’s ready” The clerk responds, turning to make his way to the back. “One moment, please.”

Will surveys the case in front of him while they wait for the beta to return: collars, dozens of collars. They are all fine leather, like his own, but few are as discreet. Most are considerably thicker, some with large O-rings on the front; or worse, a ring in the shape of a heart. Some are adorned with bells, or frills. Many have sample tags, adorned with a variety of inset gems. Some of them are engraved with actual names, while others feature pet names like “Good Girl,” “Pet,” or “Beloved.”

Will eyes them all wearily, aware for the first time of how much worse his own situation could be. He turns his head to the right, and grimaces when he sees it.

In a display case, set up in the familiar style of a display head framed by two hands, is his own collar. On either side, blue cuffs sit tightly around the wrists of the severed arms. The tag is not like his own, a considerably larger, silver, heart-shaped pendant that reads “Daddy’s boy” in an elegant script, three small sapphires set on either side to frame the words. Will looks away, brow furrowed.

“Here you are.” The clerk says, returning with a small cardboard bag. “I must say, it’s an absolutely stunning choice of color. I imagine it’s quite fetching with his eyes.”

Will's face burns, and he casts his gaze down to his shoes. The alpha chuckles warmly in response.

"Thank you, I quite agree."

"I recommend you try it on him before you leave." The beta continues. "It should be mostly the same, but sometimes the alterations can leave collars too tight. I'll be here if you gentlemen need anything."

"Yes, thank you, we will." Hanibal replies, and the beta opens the cash register drawer, busying himself with the till once more.

Alpha and omega step away from the counter, and Hannibal takes a long, black box from the bag.

"Alright, Will." He says, flipping it open.

Will eyes the alpha, suspicious.

"Tell me what you did to it." He says sharply, and the alpha sighs.

"I had them add a tracking chip." He says. "I think it is warranted to want to know your whereabouts after the Stammets incident. Besides that, it will monitor your vitals, and send an alert to my phone if anything seems off."

"Is that all?" The omega presses, and the alpha takes in a breath.

"Those are all the alterations I had made to the collar." He says. "I am afraid, however, that my expectations regarding it have changed."

Will glares at the alpha sideways, eyes narrowed. Hannibal continues.

“From now on, I would like you to wear the collar at all times, save for sleeping and bathing.” He says. “You will put it on with your day clothes, and it will remain on until you go to sleep. This is how things will be until we are mated.”

“That’s not fair!” Will protests. “That’s not what you said before.”

“Things changed when you took advantage of my trust last Thursday.” Hannibal says firmly. “We will reassess things once we’ve mated.”

“You already punished me for last Thursday.” Will argues. “Need to see my knees again? Was that not enough?”

“This is not a punishment, Will.” Hannibal says softly. “This is a precaution for your safety.”

“I can just take it off, anyway.” Will persists. “You can’t stop me if I want to run away.”

The alpha eyes the omega, tilting his head thoughtfully.

“Do I need to add a padlock, Will?”

Will huffs.

“This isn’t fair.” Will says again. “It’s so undignified. You would never do it if the tables were turned.”

Hannibal cocks his head.

“Would that make you feel better?” He asks. “If I were to wear something as well, to signify our relationship?”

“You never would, is what I’m saying.” Will replies. “No alpha would debase themselves like that, because they don’t have to. It’s another way to humiliate omegas.”

Hannibal eyes the omega for a moment. He gestures to the display case with a nod of his head.

“Pick something out, then.” He says simply, and drops the black box back into its bag.

“What?” Will asks, caught off guard.

“Pick something for me to wear.” Hannibal explains. “We’ll engrave it with your name, as your collar is with mine. I will wear mine whenever you wear yours, so that there’s nothing unfair about it.”

Will balks. Color rises to his face. He looks around the store, from display to display.

There are many tempting options: thick, black collars, in the style of the prong collar he’d worn nights ago. Collars in powder blues and baby pinks, with bells hanging off the front. But Will’s eyes stop on the case to his right, the one with his own collar inside.

The cuffs on either side are understated, in the same style as the collar between them. It is undeniable, however, what they are. They are just a touch thicker than a watch band, with the same blue velvet peaking over the sides as the collar. On their sides is a golden D-ring, to restrain the omega who wears them. They fasten with a frame and prong, like the collar between them. They are thick enough that the alpha would have difficulty tucking them beneath the cuffs of a dress shirt.

It all seems oddly fitting.

“Those.” Will says. “The cuffs.”

Hannibal exhales a laugh, warm and fond.

“They match your collar.” He says. “It is an excellent choice. Excuse me.”

The alpha flags down the clerk, who closes the till and makes his way toward the pair.

“And don’t tuck them into your suit.” Will says quickly as the clerk approaches. “If I can’t hide mine, you can’t hide yours.”

“Of course.” Hannibal replies easily. He turns to the clerk. “Do you have these cuffs in a large- or an extra large, perhaps?”

The beta eyes Will.

“I’d say he’s more likely a medium.”

“They are not for him.” Hannibal replies, chuckling softly.

“I’ll have to check in the back.” The clerk says, and disappears again.

“You have to wear them to work, too.” Will says sharply. “Like I have to.”

“Of course, sweet boy.” Hannibal answers easily. “Any time you are wearing your collar, I will be wearing the cuffs.”

Will eyes the alpha, unsure. Was he really going to do this? And so congenially? The alpha seems entirely nonplussed. Is he not worried about explaining it to coworkers? Clients? Will doesn’t understand how he can agree to this so casually. The alpha seems not to care at all.

The beta returns with two, flat, square boxes in tow.

“Large and extra large.” He says. “Though if there’s an omega at home you have in mind, I must insist that we rarely see sizes beyond medium.”

Hannibal says nothing. He opens the smaller box first, and wraps a cuff around his left wrist. The strap does not reach the buckle. He tries again with the larger box, and finds more success, the prong fitting into the second-to-last eyelet. The clerk eyes him wearily the entire time, confused.

“We will take the extra large.” Hannibal says with a grin.

“Very well.” The clerk says with a sigh, as though he still doesn’t understand what is happening in front of him. He pulls a notepad and pen from behind the register. “We can engrave the leather, if you like.”

Hannibal turns to Will.

“Is there a message you have in mind?” He asks.

The omega shrugs, eyes cast to the floor, and the alpha turns back to the clerk.

“We would like them engraved.” He says. “The same message on both sides: ‘Hannibal Lecter’- linebreak- ‘Alpha belonging to’- linebreak- ‘Will Graham.’”

The beta had scribbled as the alpha spoke, but he stops short as he finishes, a look of bewilderment on his face.

“You mean ‘belonging to the alpha, Will Graham’?” He asks.

“I do not.”

The beta exhales a breathy, nervous laugh, and crosses out what he has written on the pad.

“‘Hannibal Lecter’,” He repeats. “How do you spell that?”

“H-A-N-N-I-B-A-L L-E-C-T-E-R.” Hannibal responds.

“And ‘Will Graham’?” The beta asks. “G-R-A-H-A-M?”

“Precisely.”

The beta slides the notepad across the counter.

“Is this right?” He asks. “Linebreaks and all?”

The alpha leans over the counter, reading what the clerk has written.

“Perfect.” He replies.

“The machine is in the back.” The beta says, retaking the boxes on the counter. “Please excuse me for a moment.”

The beta disappears behind the shelves again, and alpha looks to omega, a satisfied grin on his face.

“You’re not really going to.” Will mutters, shaking his head. “I give it a week. You’re going to get tired of the way your patients look at you.”

“I don’t imagine my patients are going to view me any differently, Will.” Hannibal says softly. “And if they have any questions, it would be a point of pride to explain that they symbolize my commitment to my omega.”

“I am *not* your omega.” Will mutters, venom in his voice. “We aren’t mated yet.”

The clerk returns, this time carrying only one black box. He hands it to the alpha with a smile.

“Here you are.” He says. “Please check that everything is to your liking.”

Hannibal flips open the box and examines the cuffs. He sighs contentedly as he does so.

“Everything is in order, thank you.” He says, snapping the box closed. “How much do I owe you?”

Will is silent as the alpha pays for the purchase, turning the events over in his head. He hadn’t expected the alpha to call his bluff like that, and he still isn’t sure if he believes him. It all seems so degrading, especially the message the alpha had chosen to have engraved. “Alpha belonging to Will Graham,” what did that mean? An alpha could not belong to anyone, not the way an omega could. Will can’t help but think the alpha is toying with him again, that the entire situation will come to bite him in the end.

When the transaction is finished, Hannibal picks up the bag and steps to the side and the clerk re-busies himself with the till. Hannibal retrieves the long, black box containing Will's collar from its bag, and turns to the omega, flipping it open.

"You first." Will spits, and the alpha exhales a laugh.

"Very well." He says, and replaces the collar in its bag. He places it on the glass counter beside them, and pulls his own black box from the other bag.

He rolls his sleeves to his elbows, then puts on the cuffs, one at a time. He fastens them deftly, and Will is disappointed that they don't look as out of place as he'd hoped. With both cuffs in place, he pulls Will's collar, still in its box, from its bag for the third time.

"Your turn." He says, and Will huffs.

"I can do it myself." He responds sharply.

Will reaches for the collar and the alpha hands it over readily, placing the blue leather in the omega's hand. Will makes quick work of fastening it around his neck. As he lowers his hands, Hannibal reaches for the tag, straightening the collar so that it hangs in the center of Will's throat; and Will glares, taking a step backward.

"Very handsome." The alpha says, smiling warmly. "It really does bring out your eyes."

Will doesn't respond, ducking his head as color rises to his face, and the pair make their way out of the building.

The rest of the morning is a blur of traffic, terminals, and airport security. Hannibal leads the omega through all of it, Will trailing just behind. They sit in silence as they wait to board.

Will struggles to keep his eyes open; sitting with his arms crossed over his chest as his chin drops to his chest again and again, only to sit up with a start a moment later.

He misses the boarding announcement, rousing only when the alpha shakes him by the arm. He looks up with wide, blue eyes. The black stag glares at him over Hannibal's shoulder.

"We're boarding now." Hannibal says, voice gentle, and Will rises, clearing his throat.

They find their seats quickly. Hannibal allows Will to have the window, taking the middle seat for himself. A few minutes later, a brunette beta takes the aisle seat, bidding the pair a polite hello before putting in a pair of earbuds.

The rest of the passengers file in, and a flight attendant begins the safety presentation. Will leans against the window, nodding off, through the entire thing, and sits up with a start to an attendant leaning into their aisle, offering him a bottle of water.

He takes it without a word, ducking his head as color rises to his face.

"If you're tired, you should sleep." Hannibal says softly as the attendant walks away. "We have three hours with nothing else to do."

Will stifles a yawn.

"I don't want to sleep here." He mutters.

At this, Hannibal laughs.

But you already have." He says. "You can hardly keep your eyes open. You may as well stop fighting it."

Will exhales, considering.

“I will keep you safe, if that’s what you’re worried about.” The alpha grins, teasing, and Will meets the statement with a glare.

“Just wake me up when we start to land.” He says, and turns in his seat, so that he is resting on his shoulder.

Sleep finds the omega within minutes, sun beating in through the window to his left, warm against his cheek. He dreams he is back at Port Haven’s, looking for Abigail. This time however, no alpha looms behind him, and no beta guides him through the labyrinth of hallways. He is alone as he navigates the hospital.

The entire building is dark, empty, and quiet, the way the dayroom had been when he visited the girl the day before. Will feels cold, goosebumps prickling his skin, as he walks through pair after pair of heavy, metal doors. He walks past empty desks and nurses stations, screens left on without a soul in sight, and wonders if something has happened- if there was a reason the place was abandoned.

At one point, he stops at a desk and tries to operate the computer there, but a prompt for a passcode pops up suddenly as he navigates through the list of patients’ names, just as he arrives at the Hs, and he is forced to abandon it.

He returns to his search, the corridors now even darker than they were before, and comes upon an elevator. Like the one he rode the day before, up to the floor housing the now-orphaned Abigail, there is no button to call the elevator down. Instead, a scanner sits to its left, awaiting a fob like the one the beta carried on her lanyard.

Will reaches for it, and it beeps, emitting a red light. The doors slide open, and the omega steps in.

The floor shakes as he rides the elevator upwards, and a sense of dread permeates the air. The elevator opens, and there it is, at the end of a long hallway.

The black stag is standing in front of a heavy set of doors, head bent as he sniffs at the tile floor. Something is mounted of its antlers, but Will can't make it out until the stag turns its head and looks at him head on.

It is the dead body of Abigail Hobbs, dressed in a hospital gown, mounted the same way Cassie Boyle was found in the field. Blood dots the gown around her body where the stag's prongs poke through, Will fights the bile rising in his throat.

The stag lowers its head, then, antlers forward in challenge, and starts running toward the omega. Abigail's body bounces sickeningly in time with its steps, limbs flopping at her sides. Will pushes the button for the first floor desperately, again and again, but is met with a disapproving buzz each time- the machine prompting him for a fob.

The stag is inches from the threshold when Will awakes with a start.

"We are landing." Hannibal says softly, one hand on the omega's shoulder.

Will exhales, nodding, and shuts the window's cover. He touches his hand to his forehead to sweep the hair out of his eyes to find that he is sweating, cold and clammy.

"Bad dreams?" Hannibal asks.

"Yeah." Will says, breathy as he exhales a bitter laugh.

When the plane lands, they exit to be met with another blur of terminals and traffic. A rental car meets them outside the airport, ordered by Hannibal in advance. Will loads the address Jack had texted into its built-in GPS to take the pair to the hotel. He groans when they pull up.

"A Holiday Inn?" He snorts.

“A Holiday Inn Express and Suites.” Hannibal corrects.

“Jack made these reservations, alright.” Will snarks.

Hannibal leads him into the hotel, both of their suitcases wheeling behind him. They check in, and take the elevator to the fourth floor, where they find their room.

Will’s heart drops into his stomach when the door opens.

I the center of the room, against the right wall, stands a single, king-sized bed. Will turns his head to glare at the alpha next to him.

“There must have been a mistake.” Hannibal says, sheepish.

“*Right*.” Will spits, unconvinced,

“Will, I promise you I asked for two queens.” Hannibal says, dropping their suitcases and making for the phone on the bedside table. “Let me call the front desk.”

He takes the phone, a beige, old-fashioned thing with a curled, stretchy cord, and dials.

“Hello.” He says after a moment. “I'm afraid there's been a mistake with my room. I requested two queen-sized beds and was given a room with one king.”

There is a pause.

“Room 413.” He says.

There is another pause.

“I’m afraid I must insist we change rooms.” He says with a shake of his head. “I am an alpha rooming with an unmated omega, we cannot-”

“I see.” He says with a sigh, and turns to Will.

“There are no other rooms.” He says, voice hushed. “A dentist’s convention is in town.”

Will groans.

“Could you send up a cot?” Hannibal asks, retaking the phone.

There is another pause.

“Room 413.”

Pause.

“Thank you.”

With that, Hannibal places the phone back on its hook and turns to Will.

“They are sending a cot.” He says.

“Oh boy.” Will says with sarcastic enthusiasm. “I wonder who’s gonna sleep on the cot.”

Hannibal rolls his eyes.

“I will take the cot.” He says flatly. “It was my mistake, after all.”

“How generous.”

The knock at the door comes more quickly than Will thought it would. Hannibal opens the door to a skinny teenage beta, carrying a cot folded in the shape of a half-circle that rivals her in size. The alpha rushes to take it from her.

“You got lucky.” She says breathily in a thick Midwestern accent. “That’s the last cot in the building.”

“Then we are grateful to receive it.” Hannibal grins.

With that, theta makes her leave, and alpha and omega are alone in the room again.

“That doesn’t look like a normal cot.” Will says, turning to half-lean, half-sit against the king-sized bed. He watches the alpha wearily.

“It is.” Hannibal responds. “You simply unfold it.”

The alpha begins to raise the cot, unfolding it into a large circle. When he is done it rests on four stubby legs, only a couple of inches off the ground. A rail encircles the cot, and, erected, it is a little over half the size of a twin size bed. Hannibal drops his head into his hands.

“What is that?” Will asks.”It’s like a dog bed!”

“It is a nesting cot.” Hannibal explains. “It is for omegas, it encourages them to curl up, to make them feel safer in a strange place. The rail facilitates nesting, it wraps all the way around so that they can feel hidden and out of view.”

He looks up from the cot.

“I don’t suppose you could be convinced to share the bed?”

Will shakes his head, grinning, and Hannibal sighs.

“That’s what I thought.” He says. “Don’t worry, Will. I will make it work.”

Then, the alpha’s phone buzzes. He pulls it from his pocket.

“It is Alana.” He says. “She’s asking if we’ve arrived. Apparently Abigail is eager to go home.”

“I’m ready now if you are.” Will says, straightening to full height.

“We should go before the sun sets.” The alpha agrees. “So that we can get a good look at the yard.”

With that, the pair are off, making their way for the house of horrors awaiting them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. Big thank you to ChaosCatCube here on AO3 who gave me the idea for the jewelry store scene in a comment on chapter four.

Again, I'd really appreciate if you guys would check out my new tumblr, octopationaltherapy, which will have some art, possibly some short drabbles and other things as well. You can also ask me questions about my fics there!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Look at me, posting when I said I would!
>
> I hope you enjoy this chapter, I had a lot of fun writing it! I had to cut it short in order to get it out on time, but it's still a decent 5k.
>
> Thank you so much for reading my story and thank you to returning readers for sticking with it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When they arrive at the Hobbs' home, Alana and Abigail are standing in their coats on the walkway, staring forward. A white van, a vehicle owned by the FBI, sits in the drive, blocking Will's view of whatever they are looking out. Hannibal parks and they make their way up to the pair, from behind. Then, Will sees it.

"CANNIBALS" is scrawled across the entrance in spray paint. Abigail's breath hitches in the cold, stuttering fog emitting from her lips. Hannibal places a hand on her shoulder.

"If you want to leave, you only have to say so." He tells her. "Say the word, and we'll go. Alright, Abigail?"

Abigail shrugs his hand off roughly.

"Go where?" She asks sharply. "The hospital?"

"For now." Alana answers in Hannibal's stead.

Abigail shakes her head, exhaling. She is looking at the ground, the blood-spattered concrete of the front stoop.

“This is where my mom died?” She asks, placing the toe of her shoe upon it.

The three adults exchange looks.

“Yes.” Hannibal says.

“I was sort of expecting a body outline,” Abigail says, glancing up. There is a bitter, wistful humor in her voice. “in chalk or tape.”

“ They only do that if you’re still alive." Will says. “So they can take you to the hospital before they finish the crime scene.”

Abigail exhales shakily, gaze dropping back to the scene of her mom’s death.

“Goodbye, Mom.” She whispers.

Then, she pulls the door open, and the lot of them make their way to the kitchen, where Abigail’s father had slit her throat. The girl approaches the refrigerator.

“They turned all the pictures around.” She says, with the bitter wistfulness of before.

“Crime scene cleaners will do that.” Alana says, shifting in her spot.

“ They did a really good job.” Abigail replies “Is that where all my blood was?”

“Yes.” says Will. The girl eyes him.

“You do this a lot?” she asks. “Go places and think about killing?”

“ Too often.” Will answers, honest.

“So, you pretended to be my dad?”

“And people like your dad.”

“What did it feel like?” Abigail asks. “To be him?”

“It feels like-” Will begins slowly, and swallows. He clears his throat. “It feels like I’m talking to his shadow, suspended on dust.”

“No wonder you have nightmares.” Abigail replies, and Will stiffens.

“The attacks on you and your mother were different than the others.” He says quickly. “They were desperate. Your dad knew he was out of time. Somebody told him we were coming.”

“The man on the phone?” Abigail asks.

“It was a blocked call. Did you recognize his voice?”

Abigail shakes her head.

“I had never heard it before.”

Alana speaks, then.

“ Was there anybody new in your father’s life?” She asks, urgent. “Someone you met or someone he talked about?”

Abigail hesitates, unsure. She looks from person to person.

“Abigail, he may have been contacted by another killer.” Will says. “A copycat.”

“ Someone who’s still out there?” the girl asks.

“Yes.” Will replies.

Abigail locks eyes with Will, then, studying him. She seems unsure. She seems afraid. Her eyes glance for a moment, just a moment, to the alpha at his side. Then, they drop to the floor.

“You said there were pictures in the living room.” Alana says, and leads the girl from the kitchen.

“Seems like Abigail doesn’t like you very much.” Will says dryly to Hannibal, the pair now alone in the kitchen.

“It is not uncommon for omegas to be uncomfortable around unfamiliar alphas.” Hannibal answers easily. “I recall *you* were quite nervous when we first met as well.”

With that, the alpha leaves the kitchen for the living room. Will hesitates, then follows.

“It’s a French term.” Alana is saying as he enters. “Madness shared by two.”

“One cannot be delusional if the belief in question is accepted as ordinary by others in that person’s culture or subculture.” Hannibal says, and places a box by the fireplace, where the girl is sat. “Or family.”

Abigail rises from her seat, displeased to have the alpha stand over her. She squares her shoulders.

“My dad didn’t seem delusional.” She says, defiance in her voice. “He was a perfectionist.”

“He hardly left any evidence.” Will affirms.

“Is that why you let me come home?” asks Abigail, still staring up at Hannibal. “To find evidence?”

Hannibal swallows.

“It was one of many considerations.” He admits.

At this, Abigail lights up. When she speaks, it is with bitter faux-excitement.

“Are we gonna re-enact the crime?” she chirps, and turns to them one at a time. “You be my dad, you be my mom-”

Now, she turns to Hannibal, plastered-on smile dropping off her face.

“-and you can be the man on the phone.” she spits, eyes narrow.

Will follows her gaze to the alpha- his alpha- and sees him meeting the girl's icy stare with one of his own. The air is tense, uncomfortable with the unspoken challenge. Will exhales, relieved, when Alana speaks.

"Abigail," She says gently, touching the girl on the shoulder. "We wanted you to come home to help you leave home behind."

Abigail huffs, and turns away from Hannibal, breaking their stalemate.

"You're not gonna find any of those girls, you know." She says bitterly.

"What makes you say that?" Will asks

" He would honor every part of them." She says flatly. "He used to make plumbing putty out of elk's bones. Whatever bones are left of those girls are probably holding pipes together."

" Where did he make this putty?" Hannibal asks.

"At the cabin." says Abigail. "I can show you tomorrow."

"Abigail," Alana says, stepping towards the front door. "There's someone here."

She opens the door to reveal a dark-haired girl. Her eyes, equally dark, are heavily lined with the makeup of a young girl who does not know when to stop. She wears a leather jacket in a dark, purple red, and grins sheepishly at the other girl.

"Hey, Abigail." She says.

–

Abigail seems grateful to be in the company of her friend, and the girls excuse themselves to the yard to speak privately. The adults seat themselves on the Hobbs' couch.

"You guys seeing that attitude?" Alana asks, collapsing onto the couch. Hannibal chuckles.

"Omegas often test boundaries during adolescence." He says, unfazed. "I am the alpha in the room, so I am the enemy."

At this, Will bristles.

"Do you really think that's fair?" He asks sharply. "She's been awake for a week. She woke up in a completely different life- in a nightmare. Can we blame her for not trusting the first three people she sees?"

Hannibal and Alana exchange a look.

"And you woke up in your own nightmare these past weeks." Hannibal says gently, in his therapeutic tone of voice. "Didn't you, Will?"

Will stammers.

"We aren't talking about me." He says, petulant.

"Will, I think it's very sweet that you want to stand up for Abigail." Alana says. "But *both* of you could learn a lesson about biting the hand that feeds you."

"Believe me, Dr. Bloom," Hannibal laughs, "I am trying to teach him."

The pair laugh, and heat rises to Will's face. He opens his mouth to speak, but something catches his eye out the window.

"There's someone in the yard." He says, and all three rush to the window.

A tall figure stands in the brush at the edge of the yard, face obscured by the foggy autumn air.

"Hey!" they hear Marissa yell, voice dampened by the window. "Piss off!"

She bends at the knees and plucks a rock from the ground, throwing at the figure, but it doesn't seem to hit. Hannibal rushes to the back door with Will close behind, and Marissa hurls another rock as they approach, one that finds its mark.

"Cut out my sister's lungs while she was still using-!" The man is saying, and Marissa's rock strikes him with a satisfying thud.

He straightens, and his eyes trail upward to see Will and Hannibal approach. A last ditch effort, he spits at the girls, then turns and hurries away through the woods.

"He said he was somebody's brother." Abigail says as the pair approach.

"An alpha?" Hannibal asks, and Abigail shakes her head.

"A beta, I think." She says. "He didn't smell like an alpha."

As they speak, a dark haired woman enters the yard, walking along the treeline. Worry is etched into her lightly wrinkled face, and she inhales sharply upon seeing the girls.

“Marissa!” She cries. “Come home.”

“No!” Marissa replies sharply, stepping in front of Abigail.

The woman, her mother, reaches for her, and she dodges only narrowly.

“Come home!” she cries again.

“Can you stop being such a bitch?” Marissa spits. She turns to Abigail, and her tone softens. “See you later.”

As mother and daughter leave, Will turns to Abigail.

“He’s gone.” He says softly, of the beta in the brush. “You’ve never seen him before?”

Abigail shakes her head, and a moment of silence follows. Will turns his gaze from Abigail to Hannibal.

“Let’s go back to the hotel.” He says slowly, unsure. It is a request. “We can go to the cabin tomorrow.”

Hannibal exhales, steadying himself.

“Yes.” He says, finally. “And we should report this.”

Alana is waiting with keys in hand when they get inside, and asks no questions about leaving. As they make their way to the cars, Will stops Abigail.

“Abigail.” He says, voice a whisper, and the girl turns to look at him.

There is hurt in her blue eyes. Will swallows.

“I’m sorry.” Will says. “This is gonna stop.“

Abigail wipes her eyes.

“Please.” She mutters, face pointed towards the ground.

She is looking a few inches to her left, at the front stoop they’ve just stepped off of: the spot where her mother died.

“I promise.” Will says. “I’m gonna make it all go away.”

Abigail peels her eyes upward to look at him. She opens her mouth to say something, but doesn’t, leaving it agape. Her blue eyes bore holes into Will, and the silence hangs heavily over them. It is Hannibal who breaks it, approaching from the driveway.

“It is time to go.” he says. “Both of you.”

–

The time for sleep came quickly, but it could not have come quickly enough. Will is exhausted, not having had adequate sleep in days. He finds himself showered and ready for bed before 10 pm.

“Going to sleep already?” Hannibal asks from the small desk of the hotel room. His nesting cot sits next to it on the floor, tucked easily into the corner.

“Is that an issue?” Will asks sharply, too tired to placate the alpha.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow.

“It’s not an issue at all.” He says. “I’m quite pleased to see you take care of yourself for once. If you’re going to bed, however, you should get your pillow and sheet.”

Will huffs, but is too tired to argue. He pulls his pillow from his suitcase, top sheet wrapped around it from his search for underclothes before his shower.

He feels the alpha’s gaze on him as he climbs into bed, wrapping himself haphazardly in the sheet. He sinks against the hotel’s lumpy mattress with a huff, and sleep finds him- blessedly- quickly.

–

Hannibal leads Will through the woods, fallen autumn leaves crunching beneath their shoes. Will exhales the tightness in his chest as they near Hobbs' cabin, and his breath fogs in front of his face. Yellow police line lies, discarded, on the ground in front of the cabin door, partially obscured by the brown, fallen leaves.

Suddenly, Will is able to pinpoint it, the wrongness he has felt as they traversed the forest floor. He addresses Hannibal.

“Where’s Abigail? He asks. “Wasn’t she going to show us?”

“Alana brought her here early.” Hannibal explains. “She wanted to look at her father’s belongings in private, first.”

They are in front of the door, now and Hannibal reaches for the knob. The door does not open.

He turns to Will.

“It is locked.” He says.

Will’s heart hammers in his chest. He steps in front of the alpha, pushing him aside.

He tries the knob first, and finds it locked as Hannibal had said. He steps back, then slams against the door with every ounce of strength he has. He hears a crack, and is unsure whether it is the door or his shoulder. He inhales and steps backwards, raising his foot.

He kicks, again and again. His foot hits to the side of the lock each time. Finally, the door splinters apart, and Will pushes his way in. He freezes at the sight in front of him.

The head of the stag sits, severed, on Hobbs' carving table. Its eyes are open. Its tongue, swollen, lolls out of its mouth. These are not the things that stop Will in his tracks, however.

Abigail is mounted on its antlers, the way she had been in his dream- but this time, she is still alive.

Her chest rises and falls with each labored breath. Haggardly, she raises her head to look at Will.

She coughs before speaking, blood sputtering from her mouth. It falls in droplets across her chest. Will takes one, single step toward before her voice stills him again.

“You said you would make it all go away.” she says hoarsely. “You promised.”

It is an accusation.

Will's breath catches in his throat, and he reaches for her, but it is too late. She falls limp against the stag's antlers, dead. Will hears himself scream before he realizes he has opened his mouth

–

Will awakes with a start, breathing raggedly. He sits up against the hotel's lumpy pillows and tries to calm his breathing.

"Hannibal?" He calls, softly into the dark. Then, "Alpha?"

There is no response. Will reaches for the bedside lamp.

The nesting cot is empty, still perfectly made. He can see it from the bed, moonlight cast onto its pale sheets. Will swallows.

He glances around the room. Hannibal is nowhere to be seen. He rises.

He knocks gently on the bathroom door and, unlatched, it falls open. The alpha is not there either, moonlight reflecting against the wide, flat mirror and glowing blue on the tile floor. Will frowns.

He opens the door to the hallway, next; perhaps the alpha has just gone to get something to eat.

A male beta wearing a polo ordained with the hotel's logo is dragging a cart across the carpet. Hearing the door, he turns, and his face flushes seeing Will in his state of undress.

“So sorry!” He says in heavily accented English, and pulls his cart faster through the hall.

Will shuts the door.

He paces the room once, then twice, hoping the alpha will come back. He feels anxious without him, though he can’t imagine why. It’s not as though he’s never been alone in a hotel before.

Not knowing what else to do, he climbs back into bed.

He sits up against the pillows, waiting, and watches the door. He wants to be awake when the alpha returns, wants to ask where he’s been, understand why he left. The tan wood of the door seems to pulse with his heartbeat, quick in his chest. Slowly, it begins to morph.

The grain in its woods crawls like worms. They begin to form a face- animal, cervine. Its large, round nostrils blow fog into the room with sharp, angry huffs. Will hears footsteps- no, hooves- approaching from the hallway, and his breathing stills. He awakes to a clatter as the black stag pushes through the door, splintering it with its antlers. He cries out.

“Will!” Hannibal says, concern coloring his voice. He stands in the half-open doorway, dressed in a grey hoodie, more casual than Will has ever seen him.

He rushes to Will’s side, closing the door behind him, and grasps his hand in his own.

“It’s alright.” He says gently. “You’re safe.”

Will wrenches away, wrestling his hand from the alpha’s grasp.

“You left.” He spits.

It is an accusation.

Hannibal stiffens for a moment, a cold look etched into his face. Then, he relaxes, exhaling a breathy laugh.

“It was impossible to sleep in the cot.” He explains. “I went for a drive, which turned into a run. I’m sorry. I did not mean to scare you.”

“I wasn’t scared.” Will says, and winces at the defensiveness in his voice when it comes out. He continues, more softly. “I was just confused. What kind of run has you coming back at-”

He checks the clock on the bedside table.

“Four in the morning?”

“The kind of run that stands between a 6 foot man and a nesting cot.” Hannibal says with a grin.

Will doesn’t return it. Hannibal clears his throat.

“You had a nightmare.” He says.

It isn’t a question; it never is when the alpha says these things. Will drops his chin.

“How did you know?”

“Your scent.” Hannibal replies, gesturing in front of his face. “It’s in the air. Fear.”

Will swallows. He doesn't respond.

"It must have been something grave." Hannibal continues. "A smell so palpable after so much time."

A moment of silence passes over them, washing heavy and cold like the tide of the lakes to their north. Will breaks it.

"Abigail was dead." He says. "Mounted on a stag's head, like the Boyle girl."

"It was the Boyle girl's brother who paid us a visit today." Hannibal says softly. "Are you afraid he will seek revenge?"

"Yes." Will says. Then, "No. I don't know. Maybe. I'm scared that *something* will happen to Abigail. Something I can't protect her from."

"It is not your job to protect Abigail." Hannibal says gently, but Will sneers at the words.

"It's my job to save lives." He says. "I saved hers and- and I've got to keep saving it or I didn't save it at all!"

"If Abigail dies, your work is undone?"

"If Abigail dies, I came back for nothing!" Will balks. "Eight dead omega girls, four and a half dead pairs growing mushrooms, and no one saved. No one is safer because of me."

"You're forgetting Gretchen Speck." Hannibal argues. "And the hundreds of other possible victims Stammets may have taken if it weren't for you."

Will scoffs.

“Yeah, taking down Stammets went *so* well for me.” He spits, and gestures to his knees, beneath the blankets.

Hannibal takes in a breath, steadying himself. He is calmer when he releases it.

“It is still late.” He says. “You should get some more rest before morning.”

Will is quiet, gaze cast down to his lap. He can feel the alpha’s gaze, studying him.

“You are worried about nightmares.” Hannibal says.

“You said you would help with nightmares.” Will says softly.

Hannibal’s eyes widen, surprised. Then, they narrow, eyeing the omega with caution.

“It would be my pleasure to help you with your nightmares.” He says softly, gently.

“I suppose we’ll have to forego the hot drink.” Will says, snarking quietly. Hannibal chuckles.

“We will, unfortunately.” He affirms. “Nothing here but cheap coffee, which wouldn’t do at all. We can still talk, however.”

“About the nightmares?”

“About whatever you like.” Hannibal answers. “You may find it helpful to discuss the contents of your dreams, or you may prefer a distraction. “

“Unfortunately, distractions don’t seem to be very distracting lately.” Will says quietly.

“Then we’ll try talking about it, instead.”

Hannibal turns, and makes his way to the desk across from the bed. He pulls it to the spot where he was standing, and takes a seat.

“Tell me what you dreamed.” He instructs. “Start from the beginning.”

Will swallows. He says nothing.

“Whenever you are ready.” Hannibal presses.

“We were in the woods.” Will says after a moment. “We were going to Hobbs’ cabin, but Abigail wasn’t with us.”

Here, Will pauses. The words seem stuck in his throat, as if barbs dig them into the walls of his esophagus. He swallows again.

Hannibal simply waits.

“When we got to the cabin, the door was locked.” Will continues. “I had to break it down, like I broke down the front door the day Hobbs died.”

“The day you killed him.” Hannibal corrects.

Will gasps softly when the words hit his ears, a sharp intake of breath, and looks up at Hannibal, eyes wide. Then, he nods, and casts his gaze back to his lap.

Hannibal shifts in his seat.

“Please continue.” He says. “I am sorry for interrupting.”

A moment passes before Will speaks again.

“When we got it,” He says, “Abigail was there on the carving table, mounted on the stag’s head.”

Will stops there, chews his bottom lip. He’s waiting for Hannibal to speak, but the alpha does not. He continues after a moment, uncomfortable beneath the silence.

“She was like a centerpiece.” Will says. His voice is quiet, reverent. “Mounted there on the stag’s head, a plethora of antlers on either side, all pointing up to her. It was like there was a hole in the ceiling, like a spotlight shining down on her, reflecting on her blood.

“I remember thinking: ‘This is a gift. This is a painstakingly constructed piece of art- from the ripper to me.”

“‘A gift from the ripper to you’” Hannibal repeats. “What makes you say that?”

“An unwanted gift.” Will amends quickly. “An unwanted, misguided, *cruel* gift. It was like I could feel his shadow over my shoulder, whispering in my ear, telling me to thank him”

“Thank him for what?”

“For setting me free.” Will answers. “For giving me what he thought I needed. He thought he was cutting the rope that tied the hound to the tree, what he didn’t realize was that rope tied him to hot meals and a warm place to sleep.”

Hannibal leans forward, studying the omega.

“You feel you are chained.” He says. “But you feel the chain keeps you safe.”

Will exhales the tightness in his chest, and nods.

“What is the chain, Will?”

“ *Everyone* ” Will whispers. “Every dead body the FBI drops at my feet, every would-be victim I manage to save by the skin of my teeth. The chain is Jack and Alana and Bev- everyone counting on me to use my unwanted, misguided, *cruel* gift to save lives. The whole damn world is the chain.”

Hannibal shifts in his seat, tugging at the bottom of his hoodie the same way he did with his suits during real therapy sessions. He straightens.

“In Buddhism.” He says. “There is a concept of attachment. Put simply, attachment is everything we love- it’s the people, places, and objects we cling to. However, in order to reach enlightenment, we must shed these attachments, and move forward without them. Tell me, Will, is this chain holding you back?”

Will scoffs.

“The chain is dragging me forward.” He says. “Without the chain, I would go nowhere at all.”

“Why is that?”

“Without the chain, I would do nothing but wallow.” Will says. A smile tugs at Hannibal’s lips.

“Wallow in what?”

“In all of it.” Will says. “The pain, and the hurt and the cold of it all. Like when you look in a stranger’s eyes, and you can see all of *decades* of hurt and pain, but you can’t do anything about it because you’re on the bus or waiting in line at the DMV, so you just stand there and hold it in your chest. If I didn’t have the chain pulling me forward, I would just stand there and feel everything, forever.”

“Your empathy.” Hannibal replies. “It aims to paralyze you, but you feel that your job allows you to use it for good- to move forward.”

Will says nothing, only nods.

“You said the ripper believed he broke the chain in your dream,” Hannibal says, “by killing Abigail. So Abigail is part of your chain?”

“A link in it, yeah.” Will says. “A pretty major link. One I’d like to stay attached to.”

“But there are other links you’d rather abandon?”

Will tilts his head from side to side, considering.

“A few.” He says.

“Which links would you like to abandon, Will?”

“Garret Jacob Hobbs, for one.” Will says.

“Yes,” Hannibal says slowly. “Your empathy is not discerning in its smithing. It forms these links indiscriminately. You are appreciative of some of them: Alana, Jack, Beverly, Abigail, and, I hope, myself; but others weigh you down. And the more links that are added to your chain, the heavier it becomes, and the further it separates you from those links you cherish. Is that right?”

“Yes.” Will says, exhaled as a whisper. “I think so.”

“You know what I think, Will?” Hannibal asks.

“What?”

“I think you are wonderfully generous.” The alpha says fondly. “And I think you ought not to be.”

“You think I should be more selfish?” Will balks.

“Indeed.” Hannibal says, nodding. “You cannot continue to let every person you see attach themselves to your chain. It is heavy enough without the woman across from you on the bus or the man in line at the DMV. You’ve got to narrow it down, shorten that chain a bit.”

“I don’t know *how* .” Will responds. “The way my brain works, it just happens so fast- as soon as I see them.”

“It is a big ask for someone with empathy like yours.” Hannibal affirms. “But you must learn to prioritize who your empathy is used for, or you will destroy yourself.”

With this, the alpha rises, returning the chair to its place.

“That is enough for tonight, I believe.” He says. “We both need to sleep.”

“And you’ll be sleeping in the cot?” Will asks. Hannibal raises an eyebrow.

“Unless you’re offering me a place in your bed.” He responds.

A shock runs up Will’s spine. He feels heat rise to his face.

“I don’t know.” He says, looking down and away from the alpha. “I thought about it.”

Hannibal chuckles warmly.

“And what did you think, sweet boy?”

“I thought there’s no point in making you squeeze yourself into a dog bed when there’s a king size bed in the room.” Will says sharply. “And I thought that it isn’t like we haven’t already been as close. I’ve sat in your lap before, for Christ’s sake.”

“Very good points.” Hannibal agrees readily. “And what else did you think?”

Will is quiet for a moment, he twists the sheets in his hands.

“I thought it might help.” He admits.

“Help with what?” Hannibal asks softly.

“The nightmares.” Will says, sheepish.

“It likely would.” Hannibal affirms. “You and I have lived together for weeks now, our scents have intermingled. Your body associates my smell with home, now. It would likely soothe you throughout the night to sleep near it.”

Hannibal is close, now, standing next to Will just beyond the bed.

“Will,” He says.

The omega does not respond. The alpha reaches down and takes Will’s hand in his own.

“Would you allow me to share a bed with you tonight?” He asks softly.

Will’s mouth goes dry, face beat red. All he can do is nod. Hannibal presses the hand to his mouth, kissing it, and makes his way around the bed.

He keeps a respectful distance, plenty of space between them as both men make themselves comfortable among the scratchy hotel sheets. Will turns away from the alpha, lying stiff in his spot.

“Goodnight, Will.” Hannibal says softly, and the omega startles.

“Yeah, uh, goodnight.” He says, and turns off the light.

He tries to sleep for a short while, tossing and turning on his half of the bed. The alpha lies still, on his back, apparently undisturbed. Finally, Will sits up.

“Will-” Hannibal says, but the omega cuts him off.

“Sorry.” He says. “I don’t- this is weird. I’m just going to sleep in the cot.”

“Will, no.” Hannibal says at once, and the omega stills, turned to climb out of bed.

Will looks at him inquisitively.

“Your knees.” Hannibal explains. “It will hurt them to curl up like that. We’ve been closer before, you said so yourself. Just relax and go to sleep.”

Will quiets again, and tries to get comfortable. He turns one way, and then the other. He shifts in his spot, then turns over onto his stomach, only to flop back over onto his back a moment later. Nothing seems to work, and, frustrated, he huffs.

“Will.” Hannibal says, voice soft, but stern.

“Sorry.” Will says quickly. “I thought this would be different.”

At this, Hannibal shifts, turning over to lean on his elbow. He cocks his head, curious.

“What do you mean by that?”

Will swallows, still flat on his back. He shrugs.

“I just didn’t think it would be like this.” He says.

“How did you think it would be?”

“Different.”

“Different how?”

Will fidgets. He still lies on his back, a position that feels awkward and uncomfortable beneath the alpha’s gaze, but he is too self conscious to change it.

“I don’t know.” He whispers. “I just thought it would feel different.”

Hannibal hums warmly.

“How did you think it would feel, Will?”

Will swallows, staring up at the ceiling.

“Better.” He says after a moment. “I thought it would make me feel better.”

A moment passes in silence. Will is grateful when Hannibal breaks it.

“Look at me, Will.” He says, and the omega can hear the smile in his voice as he says it.

Will sighs, and turns onto his side, mirroring the alpha's pose. Hannibal smiles warmly at him.

"Would you like me to make you feel better?"

Will looks away, heat rising to his face.

"How would you do that?" He asks.

"After I punish you," The alpha says, by way of answer, "I hold you. Does that make you feel better?"

Will watches the alpha for a moment, and runs his tongue over his lower lip. Slowly, he nods.

"Then, I could do the same, now." Hannibal continues. "Hold you close, and make you feel better. Would you like that?"

Will is quiet for a moment, heart hammering in his chest.

"I don't know." He whispers.

Hannibal rolls back onto his back, and extends one arm to make a place for the omega to tuck himself next to his side.

"Come here, Will."

Will obeys, folding into the alpha's arms. Hannibal's scent floods his lungs, and his body instantly relaxes. The alpha closes his arm around him, pulling him closer still.

“That’s a good boy.” Hannibal coos. “Breathe in my scent, feel how it relaxes you.”

“How does it do that?” Will whispers into the alpha’s chest.

Even his mind feels calmed, thoughts that had once been racing slowed to a tranquil creep. Sleep, which had felt so impossible only moments ago, feels only an arm’s reach away.

“It’s as I said before.” Hannibal answers, and his chest rumbles beneath Will’s cheek. “Your body associates my scent with home, with comfort. Right now I am relaxed and calm, and I am pushing that scent out to you. When you breathe it in, your subconscious recalls the moments of comfort we’ve shared, when this scent was present, and your body takes the cue to relax. When we are mated, the effect will be even more powerful. I will be able to soothe you without even touching you.”

Will takes in a breath, and exhales a yawn. He curls tighter against the alpha, burrowing into his chest.

“A minute ago I thought I’d never fall asleep.” He mutters. “Now I can barely keep my eyes open.”

Hannibal chuckles.

“Completely normal.” He says. “You’re exhausted. You have not had a proper night’s sleep as long as you’ve been in my care, likely longer. Don’t fight it, Will. Sleep.”

And he does. It washes over him slowly, warm and soft like the plush blankets that covered his bed back home. That was the last thing he remembered thinking before sleep overtook him: the blankets back home. *Home* .

Is that what Hannibal's manor was? He had been there for nearly a month, but that seemed far too soon to give up the dream of returning to Wolf Trap. When he wakes, he will chide himself for the thought, but now, tucked under the alpha's arm, it is a comfort. It is as much of a comfort as the alpha himself; how safe Will feels wrapped in his arms.

Sleep comes all at once, and for the first time in weeks, Will does not dream.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaand we are *still* not done with episode three. I hope you're still enjoying it, as slow going as it is.

If you're on tumblr, check me out @octopationaltherapy

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!